THE BLACK HOOD

THOMAS DIXON

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BOOKS BY THOMAS DIXON

The Black Hood

The Man in Gray

A Man of the People
(A Play)

The Way of a Man

The Fall of a Nation

The Foolish Virgin

The Victim

The Southerner

The Sins of the Father

The Leopard's Spots

The Clansman
(The Birth of a Nation)

The Traitor

The One Woman

Comrades

The Root of Evil

The Life Worth Living

SHE TORE HERSELF FROM HIS GRASP

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THE BLACK HOOD

BY

THOMAS DIXON

AUTHOR OF "THE CLANSMAN," "THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS,"
"THE SOUTHERNER," "THE MAN IN GRAY," ETC.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author suggests to the five million members of the new Ku Klux Klan that they read this book. He guarantees to each reader the warning of an old proverb that History will repeat itself. If anyone questions the strange facts which I have related, a reference to the ten volumes of a thousand pages each, printed by the U. S. Government in 1873, entitled "The Ku Klux Conspiracy," will convince the most skeptical.

In part the events of the story were treated in the third volume of my Trilogy of the Reconstruction written seventeen years ago. The passing of the full half century from 1873 to 1923 has made it possible at last to see these events in their true perspective and record their significance.

THOMAS DIXON

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CHAPTER I

TROUBLED DAYS

ON THE opening day of the fall session of 1871 the court room was packed and the corridors jammed with a perspiring crowd struggling to get in. The rays of the southern sun were still hot. The distant ranges of the Blue Ridge Mountains lay shimmering in a mist of warm air rising from the lower hills and valleys. The heat had forced an early opening of cotton. Wagons piled with new lint could be seen standing against the wooden curb on every business street.

But the serious-looking country people who overflowed the Square had not come to Independence on business. They were not discussing the price of cotton or the prospects of a bumper crop. A rumor had spread over the county that Hawkins, the one remaining "scalawag" Judge on the bench of the Superior Court, would spring a sensation to-day in his charge to the Grand Jury. An undertone of ugly excitement trembled through the hum of subdued talk.

In the election six months before the Ku Klux Klan had swept North Carolina of every vestige of the Reconstruction régime except Hawkins. He had been appointed to fill a vacancy and had six years yet to serve. He had not been up for election. Therefore he was still a judge.

His Honor's charge made good the rumor. He demanded with savage emphasis the destruction of the new secret oath-bound order. He demanded it in fearless language. He was holding court to-day in his home town. Independence was a hotbed of the Klan. He determined that the occasion should be a memorable one. It would make or unmake his career.

The Klan revolution, swift, relentless, complete, had stunned the minds of the nimblest politicians. Many, who prided themselves on their ability to turn quicker than any tide, had been left high and dry gasping at the results. The Klan had elected every judge nominated, and a new legislature. They had arraigned, tried and impeached the Governor of the State, removed him from office and deprived him of his citizenship. They had set, in this act, a new precedent in American history. Their victim was the first Governor of an American Commonwealth to be thus degraded.

There was no question about the size of the majority at the polls. There was no question about the methods used to secure it. They had met force with force and won by audacity. The Reconstruction Government had been established by the bayonets of the northern army. The negroes, wearing yet the rags of four thousand years of slavery, suddenly clothed with the sovereign power of the ballot, were allowed to vote on the same day to enfranchise themselves and disfranchise their former masters—sons of the men who had created the American Republic.

This semi-African government, established and supported by the bayonets of a victorious army, was supposed to be invincible. Hawkins had studied the situation and so decided. The new régime would last for at least a quarter of a century. He deserted his political associates and threw the full weight of his personality to the new

order. He figured that half the white vote, tired of war and its bitter aftermath, would follow his example. United with this wing of radical whites, the negroes could outvote the old conservative crowd two to one for all time.

He had been immediately rewarded with a seat on the bench, and his eye was fixed on the Governor's chair.

But the thing on which he had not calculated had happened. He forgot that a government set up by force might be as suddenly overturned by force. The Ku Klux Klan appeared. Their white-robed men and horses struck sudden terror to the ignorant rabble of new voters. On the night before the election ghosts rapped on every negro's door. In sepuchral tones they warned the black citizen that death awaited him in the morning if he dared to vote.

When day dawned, the negro, ignorant and helpless, an easy prey to superstition and fear, took to the woods. And the white "Conservatives" overwhelmed the new order.

Hawkins was the one man of the Reconstruction Government who refused to surrender. Instantly he became the leader of the defeated party. And he was a man with whom his enemies would have to reckon. Six feet two inches tall, with hooked, eagle-beaked nose and steel-gray eyes set beneath shaggy brows, he commanded attention in any crowd. The first impression he gave to a student of history was that he might be a descendant of the free-booters and buccaneers of the age of Elizabeth. His name also suggested it. Sir Walter Raleigh had landed the first colony of whites on Roanoke Island in North Carolina. This colony was left helpless by the attack of the Spanish Armada. When relief came, two years later, the colony had disappeared. The evidence is now complete that they moved into the interior and mingled with a tribe of friendly

Indians. In Hawkins' high cheek bones and stolid features there was a suggestion of the Indian.

His education was indifferent but his command of the English vernacular was crisp and convincing. He was endowed with a rude eloquence that made him a formidable debater and successful stump speaker.

To the amazement of the crowded court room, in his charge to the Grand Jury he boldly challenged the power of the Klan. He demanded the immediate arrest, conviction and imprisonment of every member. He denounced them as the leaders of a new rebellion against established law and a menace to the peace of society.

A majority of the Grand Jury were members of the Klan. And the Judge suspected it. But his words had the ring of authority and, spoken in the deep tones of his resonant voice, they made a profound impression.

The Grand Jury filed out amid a silence that was painful. A few thoughtful members of the Klan who listened to his incisive words, deep in their hearts felt that he might be right, renegade and scalawag though he was. But they wondered what the results of his challenge would be in the county and the state. The wires were already hot with their report.

The effects in the court room were apparent in the tension between the presiding Judge and the group of lawyers in attendance. No lawyer could dare to take exception to a word uttered. Yet they despised this renegade and traitor to his race with a venom equaled only by the hatred in the breast of the Judge.

Hawkins asked for no compromise. He had made up his mind to take no insolence from the most venerable member of the bar. His manner was irritable. He was looking for the slightest attempt to express for him the contempt felt in every lawyer's breast—save one.

On this one young attorney he smiled broadly. George Wilkes was his favorite. He made no bones of his liking. He favored Wilkes with an insolent boldness that left nothing to the imagination of his rivals. He had but to suggest a desire to the Court and it was granted. When an opposing lawyer scowled, Hawkins grinned in his face and said without words:

"Well, he's engaged to my daughter. I like him—what'ell can you do about it?"

There was nothing to be said or done by the Bar. Wilkes was the man of the hour. His practice would be doubled at this session of the court. His ruddy face was wreathed in smiles. He shot a look of triumph at his rival, John Craig, who merely lifted his eyes to the ceiling, drummed his pencil on the table and ignored the challenge.

Wilkes, already the richest man in the county, was ambitious to be the most popular. He had been called the best-looking young man in western North Carolina. In his own opinion there was no doubt about it.

He was in fact a fine-looking animal—six feet tall, a good figure, a little coarse and heavy in the neck, but with smooth, regular features. He was born in the same year as Craig. They were just thirty years of age.

Their careers had been in sharp contrast. Wilkes had avoided service in the Civil War by hiring a substitute and emerged from the struggle the wealthiest man in the county. It was hinted that if the Treasury agents who had stolen thousands of bales of cotton under the confiscation acts of the Radical Congress would speak they might explain this fortune. But they had not spoken. The young fox had been too clever. His tracks were covered.

John Craig, on the other hand, had tramped home from the war with a record of four years' service—a veteran of

twenty-six battles—scarred with wounds, and without a dollar. His bread now depended on the meager returns of his law practice.

Wilkes had not chosen Hawkins as his favorite judge by design. It was an accident. He had met his daughter Claudia at a school reception in Washington while there in conference with a Treasury agent. He had fallen in love with her and, after the fashion of pretty southern girls, she had allowed herself to become "engaged." It was her first adventure of the kind. Wilkes felt that he was honoring a scalawag judge by marrying into his family.

Hawkins was undoubtedly awed by the wealth of his prospective son-in-law. He had never been a slave-owner. He was still poor—so poor, in fact, that he could scarcely keep up appearances in the Craig mansion to which he had mysteriously fallen heir, just after Lee's surrender.

The mystery of his ownership of the Craig homestead may have accounted for the peculiar venom with which he honored John Craig.

The moment the young lawyer rose to address the Court, Hawkins bristled. His decisions were invariably against him. He not only decided every point against him, but went out of his way to browbeat and insult when possible. For the first hour of the call of the long calendar, Craig stood this with studied patience. And then he suddenly exploded with a sharp retort that left Hawkins breathless for an instant.

A ripple of applause swept the court room. The Judge scowled. The Sheriff called sharply for order.

Hawkins glared at the crowd:

"Another sound from you, and I'll clear the court room!"

The huddled bunch of negroes high up in the right

corner gave a murmur of approval led by old Julius, a former slave of the Craigs—now in the Judge's employ.

Hawkins lifted his long arm in a gesture for silence and Julius subsided before the Sheriff had issued the Judge's order. He turned from the negro and fixed Craig with a glare. He hesitated for a bare moment in the determination to strike his enemy the deadliest blow possible. Craig's language had made him liable to the charge of contempt of court. Hawkins had begun and persisted in his browbeating tactics with the hope of creating this situation. He had the young lawyer exactly where he wanted him.

The only question now was what penalty to inflict. A fine, the usual thing, was too weak for consideration. He could demand an abject apology. Craig would refuse and he could send him to jail for thirty days.

That would be something like it! The steel-gray eyes gleamed with a steady glare of hatred and still he did not speak. There was something in the deadly way the younger man watched that made him pause. Craig had folded his arms and faced the Judge with a look of unmistakable contempt. The issue was squarely drawn, and now that the clash was on, Hawkins realized for the first time that he had provoked a situation that could lead to grave results.

To send Craig to jail might precipitate a crisis for which he was not prepared. The new Governor, elected by the Klan, would be slow to send troops to the scene if he demanded their presence. Exactly what the young lawyer's standing was in this secret order he could only vaguely guess. That he was a leader of some sort was certain.

A rumor had been widely circulated that Craig was the Chief of the Klan in the state and that he had secretly conducted the daring campaign of terror that had over-

turned the Reconstruction Government. The Judge dismissed this yarn as too absurd for a moment's belief. He was too young for such a position of responsibility. And yet, as he nervously pulled at his long black beard and studied Craig's set face, he was not sure. He had served in Jeb Stuart's cavalry in the war. Stuart had died a lieutenant general at twenty-eight.

A jail sentence might result in an uprising that would bring his own house down over his head. He must not allow his hatred to get the better of his judgment.

A jail sentence was not the thing. Hawkins's eye shifted from Craig in a movement of confusion and rested on Wilkes' smiling face. His decision was instantly made. There was a deadlier blow which he could strike. It would stir no dangerous passions. It would put his enemy out of court. It would help his future son-in-law in his fight for place and power. Both Wilkes and Craig were candidates for the District Attorneyship, a position that would lead to the nomination for Congress at the end of the term.

He would demand an abject apology. Craig would refuse to make it. He would disbar him from the practice of law and put him out of the running. In the flood of cheap lawyers, which came in with the Reconstruction system of admitting any fool to the bar who could pay a license fee of ten dollars, the judges had been clothed with the arbitrary power of disbarring any offender. This power yet remained.

He would use it. His eyes lighted with a sinister smile as he leaned over his desk and spoke with insulting malice:

"Apologize to me, instantly, sir—or I'll disbar you from the practice of law—"

Craig's square jaw closed and his lips twisted. He did not believe that Hawkins would dare such an outrage. It was too absurd for belief. Besides, he had in his pocket a

document with which he could return the blow with double force. With that folded piece of paper he could impeach and hurl this incompetent blustering jayhawker from the bench. And he'd do it, too, if provoked. Craig deliberately moved a step closer, his fists slowly closed and the fold of his arms tightened. He looked at the Judge with a quiet smile in dead silence.

The white crowd in the court room broke into cheers. Before the Sheriff could speak, the Judge rapped furiously for order. A wave of excitement swept the scene.

Nathan Klein, the Jew merchant of Main Street, a client of Craig, rose from his seat, and gestured excitedly to Sammy, his little lame boy who haunted the court room with a passion for romance and excitement. He had slipped into the inclosure of the bar railing and was edging closer to the scene. He carried in his arms a dog. Craig was his favorite lawyer. Sammy smiled his admiration and the dog wagged his tail in approval.

Klein saw the boy's position of danger. He was almost in line between the two men glaring at each other in mortal hate. He tried again to attract his attention. Sammy was too intent in admiration for his hero to notice signs. He squatted against the railing immediately beneath the Judge's desk and fixed his enraptured gaze on Craig.

When his father failed to get his attention and started to sit down, Berry Lowery, a county tough, threw him roughly aside and took his seat. The Jew ignored the crude insult, glanced at the half-drunken intruder and moved into the crowd near the door. In a quick glance he fixed forever in memory the face of a man destined to play a leading rôle in the crisis of his life. He moved away with a feeling of vague foreboding. The beastly lines of Lowery's face haunted him. He glanced over his shoulder and watched him chewing a cud of tobacco and spitting

carelessly on the floor. The tough drew a flask of corn whisky from his pocket and, indifferent to the occasion or his surroundings, drank half of it. With a look of disgust Klein turned back toward Craig.

The Judge took up his pen and began to write the order of disbarment. He wrote in quick nervous irritation.

Again the group of negroes stirred in approval. There were winks, grins and nods and subdued expressions of joy. Old Julius led the chorus of praise. In low tones of half-religious ecstasy he breathed:

"Glory ter God, dar's one Jedge dat ain't afraid!"

"Yes, Lawd!"

"Hallelujah!"

"Amen!"

The responses were low but the negro ears had heard. There was one sharp dissenting voice. It came from Craig's faithful man Henry, who had followed his fortunes with or without pay since the war. If the young lawyer had money, Henry got his share. When he had none, Henry worked with equally lazy indifference. His cheerful laziness was uniform in good or bad fortune.

Henry glared at Julius. He hated this black, unctuous hypocrite for more than one reason. He meant to get even with him one fine day when the good Lord gave him a chance.

"De Jedge ain't done nuttin', yet!" Henry sneered.

He spoke so loudly the Sheriff bawled:

"Order!"

Julius grinned and Henry subsided.

Hawkins finished his writing amid an ominous silence. The older men at the bar glanced at each other and shook their heads in grave misgiving. Wilkes was jubilant. His smile was steady. It wouldn't come off. The Judge again

caught sight of him and, to the amazement of the lawyers, beckoned.

He sprang to his feet and answered promptly. The Judge leaned across his desk and whispered:

"I've signed the order of disbarment. What do you say?"

Wilkes hurried to reply in quick low tones:

"Serve it on him. He can't lift his little finger!"

Hawkins settled back in his chair and fixed Craig with a look of stern judicial poise. His chin was lowered until his long whiskers bent against his collar as he spoke:

"For the last time, sir, I give you a chance to save yourself by an abject apology. Will you submit?"

Craig stood immovable, his dark eyes staring at Hawkins in steady menace.

The crowd caught the tension and a pin fall would have registered.

Sammy leaned closer. The dog in his arms got the strain, and suddenly barked.

The tension broke in a roar of laughter. Sammy clapped his hand on the dog's mouth too late. The Judge glared over his desk and shouted to the Sheriff:

"Take that boy and that dog out of here!"

The Sheriff apologized to the Court, seized Sammy by the arm and led him limping through the grinning crowd. His father caught him at the door and shook him soundly for his folly. The Jew had never liked dogs. But Sammy had become an orthodox southern boy at an early age. On account of his lameness his father had never been able to deny the little wistful face a desire of his heart and the dog had become the boy's inseparable companion.

The interruption had given the Judge a moment to collect his thoughts and weigh his act with deliberate

judgment. He called the Sheriff, and handed him the order of disbarment.

"Serve the order on John Craig and see that this gentleman does not enter the bar rail again as an attorney."

The Sheriff took the order, delivered it to Craig and whispered:

"Sorry, sir. Let me know if I can help you—"

Craig nodded.

"Thank you, Sheriff."

He took the order, tore it slowly into pieces and dropped the bits on the floor. Wilkes was still standing near the Judge's desk in a broad grin, looking at his rival.

Craig lifted his long arm and pointed with a deliberate insulting gesture at Hawkins.

"You have disbarred me from the practice of law, sir, to elect your favorite the next District Attorney—"

A cheer swept the crowd. The suddenness of it surprised and alarmed the Judge. He glanced hurriedly over the room and saw the hostile eyes pressed on him. How far Craig's partisans might go, he could only guess. He was so surprised by the savage volume of the cheers that had greeted Craig's accusation, he forgot to order the Sheriff to preserve silence. The Sheriff was so surprised he forgot to yell "Order!"

Wilkes was the first to find his voice.

"I protest against the insult, your Honor. I hope the court will give this man an additional sentence of thirty days in jail—"

The Judge smiled, lifted his hand to Wilkes for silence and said slowly:

"The court is adjourned until to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

The Sheriff ordered the crowd to rise. The Judge

passed out behind the railing to the door, followed by Wilkes, and the crowd surged toward Craig.

They wrung his hand and told their sympathy and indignation. He received it with a curious reserve. His mind was not on the scene. He was brought back at last to the consciousness of what was happening by Henry's loud voice booming over the crowd. The negro couldn't push his way rudely through the throng that circled his master, but he waved his black hand over their heads.

"Dat's de way, Marse John! You sho stood your groun' lak a Craig always stan's. I wuz proud of you, sah."

The young lawyer smiled for the first time. The old saying that no man is a hero to his valet had not held good. He nodded gravely and said:

"Thank you, Henry. I appreciate your approval."

Sammy pressed close, pushing his way through in spite of his lameness. He held up the dog.

"Shake hands with Mr. Craig!"

The dog extended his paw, his eyes winked and his tail wagged. Craig took the extended paw and stroked it.

Sammy explained:

"He was cussin' the Judge for you, sir."

The dog barked his approval and Craig stroked his paw again and said:

"I understand, sir, we've both been honored by the Court to-day. I appreciate your sympathy."

Klein pressed close and seized Craig's hand.

"A shame, my good friend—a shame! You have in me a better friend than you know. You will remember this?"

Craig nodded and pressed the extended hand as he passed out through the crowd. The words had left a peculiar impression on his mind. There was something beneath them. He felt it with a distinct surprise. The Jew had always been his client. In fact, he was his first

paying client when he had opened his law office. But he wondered what he had meant by saying: "You have in me a better friend than you know!" The more the thought of it the more it puzzled him.

Outside the door of the courthouse Wilkes lingered in conversation with the Judge. It was characteristic of Hawkins to linger after the demonstration against him. He would see if any individual in the crowd would attempt a show of personal hostility. He knew most of the townspeople. Off the bench and outside of his low, political associates he was a man of genial temper and had the knack of winning personal friendships. Socially he was a good mixer. He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the best poker players in the county and he played a daring square game.

In politics only was he crooked. He was frank about it, too. His theory of Democracy was that the people were fools. And the shrewdest rascal was sure to succeed.

He still lingered in front of the courthouse to see if any of his townsmen would question the abuse of his power which he had just made.

While he talked to Wilkes in laughing banter, Craig and his friends passed through the door and suddenly confronted them.

Wilkes turned to go.

"I'll have the buggy ready in five minutes, Judge—ride down with me?"

Hawkins nodded.

Klein, the boy, with the dog still in his arms, and Henry followed Craig. The Judge ignored his enemy and glanced toward the sky as if to reckon the weather. Craig threw him a contemptuous look. Hawkins smiled grimly. There was no question of his courage.

The dog held a different view of Court etiquette. He

saw his enemy and with a fierce growl tried to break Sammy's hold and get the Judge. Hawkins heard the smothered growl, turned in fear and began to back.

Sammy clung to the squirming, snarling form with desperate strength.

"Hi—here—now—behave—be still—I tell you—quit it—"

The Judge's eyes were shining with real terror as he continued to move away. He faced men with courage, but he had always been afraid of a dog. Craig laughed, put his hand on the dog's head and said gently:

"That'll do now, Sport. I'll attend to the Judge."

The dog wagged his tail, and stopped his struggle. He had the strange power of judging men's character often seen in animals. He knew a fool or a rascal by an unerring instinct. They were the only kind of men he ever tried to bite. And he knew the difference between the boy's pleading for peace and the touch of a master's hand on his head commanding it.

Craig turned to Henry and beckoned.

Henry grinned and hurried forward. Craig drew him aside.

"Saddle my horse, ride out to Ben Logan's and tell him I want to see him right away."

"Yassah—" Henry nodded.

The Judge was just turning the corner. Craig watched him with a look of cold hate.

CHAPTER II

CLAUDIA

THE one fine trait in the Judge's character was his love for a beautiful daughter. He had given Claudia an unusual education for the times. The fact that her mother had died when she was a child had of course been an influence in keeping her in boarding school since she was twelve years old. But beyond this was the desire to make live in her the finer things of life which he had crushed out of his own soul.

He had spared nothing in her education. When money was needed for her college course in the North, he got it. He borrowed it sometimes. He begged it often. And sometimes he stole it. But always he got it.

If she were a little spoiled by his indulgence, she made up for it in charm and beauty. Hawkins was immoderately proud of her. Down in his crooked heart the ambition for place and power was rooted in his love for this accomplished girl. In every dream of triumph, he saw her by his side and heard the whispered comments of friend and foe. He had gotten the Craig mansion with its big white columns shining through cedars and magnolias because he saw her standing at its old-fashioned colonial door welcoming his guests.

And she had won the richest young man in the county before her school days were over. She was his mascot. Every shadow of life would be lifted now by her smile. It was this thought that had given him the insolent daring to openly favor Wilkes in court. Let mossback

lawyers rave. He didn't give a tinker's dam. To the devil with their traditions. The old world was passing. He had cast his lot with the new. The old pride and pomp and ceremony of the slaveholding South made him sick anyhow. His daughter would set the pace for a new world.

He thought of these things with a smile, recovered his dignity and hurried to join Wilkes for the ride to his house.

Claudia was leisurely putting the last touch to her toilet for the buggy ride with Wilkes. She scarcely thought of him as her fiancé. He had proposed in Washington the first week she had met him. She had laughingly accepted his offer of marriage as a tribute to her youth and charm. As for really marrying him—it was too early to speculate. There was time to change her mind many times. In fact she had not yet made up her mind. Life was too fresh and sweet for such worries. She had been penned up in school and college for ten years. Now she would live. And she would live to her finger tips.

She dressed with a care that took in any eventuality. She had been in town but a week. Wilkes was the only man she knew. No matter what his wealth and position, she would take stock of them all. And she meant to take stock of her own heart before leaping into a thing so final as marriage.

She smiled into the old-fashioned oval mirror. A perfect oval face to match the mirror's frame. Dark waving hair gleaming in the rays of the setting sun that poured through her window. Wide-open brown eyes laughing beneath their arched brows. A fine, loving, wholesome personality that made friends. And she had beauty in real endowment. A face no man could pass the first time

without turning. Many a time she had laughed at the unfailing test.

She laughed now at the thought of it as she turned to Aunt Laura, who stood holding her poke bonnet and gazing with rapture.

"How's that?" she asked.

The colored woman's fat figure shook with merriment. When her laughter subsided she gazed a moment and said:

"Des one look—an' you'll knock him dead, honey!"

The girl joined in her laugh, took the poke bonnet and adjusted its ribbon beneath the dainty chin.

Aunt Laura leaned closer.

"Lawd, chile, you ought ter been married at sixteen. Been wastin' time in dat college—"

"Nonsense, I'm only twenty-two. Just old enough to look around with a little common sense—"

"An' ye gwine ter look round, too—I bet ye!" the fat one ventured.

"I'll bet so, too," Claudia whispered as the sound of crunching buggy wheels echoed from the graveled drive in front of the porch.

The buggy stopped, Wilkes leaped out and the Judge followed. In a moment Claudia stepped between the two center columns and paused before coming down. Wilkes' hat was lifted and the Judge beamed his pride.

He seized the young lawyer's arm and whispered:

"Lord, boy, isn't that a picture?"

"Glorious—" the younger man agreed.

"You're a lucky scamp, sir—"

Wilkes straightened himself.

"I was born lucky, Judge—"

Claudia lightly walked down the low marble steps.

Hawkins seized both hands and looked her over in rapture. He spoke in low tender tones:

"You're the prettiest thing that God ever made in this old sinful world—"

"Sh!" Claudia whispered.

She drew her hands from her father's and threw Wilkes a laughing challenge:

"I hope you haven't worked too hard to-day, Mr. Lawyerman?"

Wilkes winced at the impersonal tones of her voice. He had hoped that she would begin to treat him as a real lover now that their engagement would be announced at home. He did his best to answer her banter in kind. He bowed with assumed gravity and said:

"And if I had fainted from overwork, fair lady, the sight of you would revive my drooping spirits."

Claudia smiled.

"That's pretty good, sir. Thank you."

The Judge touched her arm as Wilkes moved to help her into the buggy.

"Don't stay out too late, darling—"

She smiled as she settled in the seat.

"There's a full moon to-night, Dad—"

Wilkes seized the lines and the little buggy spun down the drive.

Hawkins stood a moment watching it. His deep-set eyes were dimmed as a look of tenderness and pride overspread his rugged face.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE HOOD

IN A DINGY law office over a store on Main Street, Craig paced the floor impatiently. He stopped at the window and his eyes rested on the white pillars of his old home on the hill at the end of the street. It had always been the show place and pride of the town. The wide-spreading lawn with its stately cedars and magnolias covered ten acres in the heart of the present business section. The town had built around it, yet never encroached on its grounds.

He stared at it now with a new look of rage. This morning before entering the courthouse, he had received the anonymous letter explaining how Hawkins had gotten hold of it in the black days that followed the assassination of Lincoln. He had not yet been mustered out of Johnson's army. When he arrived at last, footsore, worn and heartsick, the home had been sold. Hawkins had bought it and moved in.

He began to understand now the venom with which the old scalawag had treated him in court. It was more than human flesh could bear. He didn't intend to bear it.

As he watched the shadows of dusk creep slowly over the white fluted columns, his face settled into a grim resolution. He came of a race of soldiers and leaders of men. He had accepted the poverty and suffering of defeat in war with a soldier's smile and had gone to work to retrieve his fortunes. He had only asked a man's chance to start life over again. He realized now that

the cards had been stacked against him. He had at last uncovered the rogue's hand that had swindled him. He would strike now and strike to kill. There was no splutter, no noise, no cursing or raving. Just the deadly decision to act, and at once.

He turned toward a sideboard which stood just inside the door of his bedroom. This inner room of the office he had fitted up for sleeping quarters and Henry kept it in as good order as a lazy negro of the old régime, unaccustomed to housekeeping, knew how.

He lifted the silver-trimmed decanter, removed the tall stopper and poured a drink of whisky. He raised the glass to his lips, paused, lowered it and stood scowling. His lips twisted, his brow wrinkled and his jaw closed firmly. He threw the whisky into the fireplace and straightened his tall figure.

"No, I don't need that sort of courage, to-night—" He turned at the sound of the closing of the center door as Henry leisurely entered.

Craig scowled:

"Where the devil have you been all this time?"

"Mr. Logan's comin' right away, sah. He be here any minute."

Henry bustled about the room. Craig continued to scowl.

"I said, where have you been?"

Henry grinned:

"No whar, sah. Des drap round by de ole place ter pass de time er day wid my former wife, sah—"

"Old Julius will beat the life out of you if he catches you fooling round Aunt Laura—"

"Yassah!" Henry laughed. "But dat's de pint. He can't catch me!"

Henry busied himself with imaginary work in the room

and Craig slowly turned back to his desk, dropped into the chair and turned his face again toward the window through which he could still see the ghostlike pillars in the rays of the rising moon.

Henry moved toward the inner door and closed it softly. He quickly opened the bureau drawer and rummaged through its contents, found the object of his search and held it up admiringly—an old-fashioned red hunting vest.

"He ain't wore dat since de war!" he murmured. "'Tain't no count lyin' in dar. De moths gwine eat it up ef somebody don't wear it. I'm gwine ter save it."

He took the gay reminder of better days, folded it with care and wrapped it in a piece of newspaper. Craig's drawling call came through the closed door. He instinctively thrust the vest behind his back and answered:

"Yassah!"

A moment later the second call came in sharper tones:

"What are you doing in there?—Come here!"

"Yassah! Right away, sah—right—away—sah!"

Henry carefully slipped the vest inside his shirt bosom, buttoned the shirt, hummed a tune carelessly, emerged into the outer office, and stood waiting for orders. The young lawyer was slow to speak. In fact he had forgotten the call, forgotten that Henry lived to try his patience. His eyes were set in a far-off look and his fists were slowly opening and closing.

Henry came closer:

"Yassah, you call me, sah?"

Craig turned in surprise, stared a moment and remembered his call:

"You can go now. I don't need you for anything. And don't come back till ten in the morning. I want to sleep late."

His man laughed softly.

"Yassah, dat suits me. I'se er little 'gagement o' my own ter night."

Craig waved his long arm carelessly.

"All right. Get out."

Henry hastened through the outer door and down the narrow stairs to the street. He paused at the entrance and looked up and down. No one was passing at the moment and he slipped the vest out of the folds and spread it carefully on his arm to save it from wrinkling.

The full southern moon flooded the town with a silvery glory. The first mild winds of autumn stirred the leaves in the trees, and swung the weather-stained sign:

JOHN CRAIG

ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR AT LAW

in a weird sigh.

Henry glanced up at the sign with a superstitious shiver and hurried to his room.

As he turned the corner he all but collided with Ben Logan, who stood talking to a group of five men. There was no mistaking Logan. His lanky, sinewy frame rose six inches above the others and his slouch hat sat on his shaggy head in a way all its own.

Henry decided suddenly to cross the street. He care-

lessly moved diagonally to the other side and glanced over his shoulder at the group of men huddled in earnest talk. He wondered what they were doing there with Logan at such an hour. Maybe a lawsuit. They were all witnesses. Yes, that was it. They were talking over the case before going upstairs to see the lawyer. He quickened his step and gave no further thought to the incident.

As Craig watched the old homestead the lamps were lighted, first in the great hall, then in the parlors and a little later in his mother's room upstairs. He wondered what it meant. Hawkins had kept the place almost in total darkness since his advent. He must have guests. He wondered who they could be. The old scalawag was too mean and stingy to entertain his friends. Could he have placed a guard in the house during the court session? That too was improbable. It would cost money, and Hawkins would have to pay it.

As Craig still stared at the lights gleaming through the shadows of the trees on the lawn, he heard a quiet footstep outside his door and lifted his eyes as a soft signal knock echoed from the panel.

Without rising he called:

"Come in."

The door opened and the lanky figure of Logan entered and without words came down to the desk. There was an uncertainty in his movements that irritated Craig.

The lawyer looked up sharply:

"Well, are you ready?"

Logan pulled his drooping mustache, nodded carelessly, and turned back toward the door. Craig rose and followed, hat in hand. To his surprise, Logan merely opened the door, looked out, closed it, took Craig's arm and led him back to the desk.

"Let's set down a minute," he said solemnly.

Craig dropped into his seat with a gesture of impatience, while the lanky figure slowly drew a rickety chair beside him.

"We've no time to lose—" the lawyer cried with a touch of anger.

"I'm a-thinkin' we may save time by not hurryin'," was the quiet answer.

"You're not ready?"

The countryman nodded, drew a white robe and hood from a bundle beneath his coat and laid them on the desk.

"You see I am—"

"Well, what's the matter?" Craig asked.

The gray eyes of the man opposite held the lawyer's in a steady stare. It was some time before he spoke:

"Chief, you told me the last time I wuz in to see you that the Klan's work wuz done—"

The young lawyer fidgeted in his seat, his nervous fingers fumbled a paper cutter, he hesitated and then scowled his answer:

"Just one little call on old Hawkins to-night and we *are* done—for all time."

Logan shook his head:

"Hit's a ticklish business, Chief. He's a scalawag, but he's a Jedge and there'll be hell to play if we raid him—"

"You're afraid?"

Logan pursed his lips.

"Don't make me laugh. I got the sore mouth—"

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Yer best plan's ter leave the Jedge to me. I heard all about what he done to ye to-day—"

"Leave him to you—what do you mean?"

Logan pulled his mustache thoughtfully.

"Oh, nothin' much. You jest ax for yo' rights in court to-morrow mornin'. They'll be a row, and the Jedge'l' git shot—*ac-ci-dental!*"

The lean face showed in twitching muscles his deadly purpose.

Craig shook his head emphatically.

"That's not my way, Ben. I don't ask my friends to do for me what I'm afraid to do myself—come on!"

He rose quickly and Logan slowly followed.

Craig's dark eye held the countryman for a moment.

"Are you still taking orders?"

The lanky figure stiffened.

"Chief, I followed you through four years of hell in the war. These is more ticklish times. There's a powerful lot o' dam' fools tryin' ter git in the Klan. And some of 'em a-gettin' in. But I'll charge the Pit with my bare hands ef *you* give the word—"

Craig smiled. The man's faith had touched the deep place in his heart. He knew that the enterprise on which he had embarked was reckless—reckless to the point of insane folly. He also knew that, if he dared to wield the power of the secret order of oath-bound disguised men which he commanded, he could defy authority and do as he pleased.

Yet he felt in the hesitation of this simple, uneducated mind an accusation that made him pause in spite of his resolution.

After a moment's tense silence he placed his hand on Logan's arm.

"Hold your men here for an hour, while I talk to old Hawkins. I'll give the scoundrel one chance."

Logan nodded, lowered the lamp, walked quickly to the door and signaled. One by one, five shrouded forms slowly moved into the room. The white-spiked hoods

seemed to add three feet to each man's height. The moonlight streaming through the uncurtained window wrapped the figures in an uncanny haze.

Each sinister form saluted Craig. He stared in brooding silence, gazing at the lights in his old home and made no response.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENCOUNTER

UNCONSCIOUS of impending danger Hawkins slouched carelessly in an armchair beside the table in the great hall of the Craig homestead, gazing at its age-dimmed portraits with a glow of satisfaction as its owner. What the devil did he care for the bluster of the young fool whom he had disbarred from his court? He had six years yet to serve on the bench. A politicial revolution might sweep him into the Governor's chair before that time. His plans were already laid.

He smoked a cigar with quiet enjoyment, and took up his party organ, *The Sentinel*, a weekly sheet published at the Capital, to glance at the latest news. His eye rested on an article in the first column of the front page and he read it with growing amazement. Amazement deepened into rage as he scanned the final paragraph.

The front door bell rang and Julius hurried to open it. The negro was evidently expecting this call as well as his master.

Blackmar, the Chairman of the State Executive Committee of Hawkins' party, stepped inside. He paused and slyly whispered to the negro. Julius indicated the back yard. Blackmar winked and nodded. Julius hurried to the kitchen and Blackmar came down briskly to the Judge.

In his anger Hawkins remained seated to show his contempt for his political associate.

He rapped the paper furiously.

"It's time you called, to explain that, sir!"

"Just what I came for," Blackmar responded genially, as he drew up a chair. Hawkins glared at his visitor with undisguised hatred. There was one creature he hated more cordially than the old Bourbon aristocrat, and that was the freebooter who had followed the Northern army into the South with an empty carpetbag in one hand and an itching palm in the other. The carpetbagger had used the appeal to Federal power to capture the offices which belonged by right of birth to the native scalawags who had earned these places by the betrayal of their principles.

He had to use this particular carpetbagger because he had proved himself a leader of men. He had brains. He had a genius for politics. He had become Chairman of the State Committee for that reason. Hawkins early recognized the fact that Blackmar was the boldest, most unscrupulous, and brainiest adventurer who had ever entered the State from the slums of the North. And he had cultivated him from the first.

"What do you mean by this article, sir?" the Judge stormed.

Blackmar smiled.

"Surely you can get the big purpose behind my words?"

"Sure I do," Hawkins snorted. "You've set out to double cross me by currying favor with the negroes!"

"Nonsense," protested the carpetbagger. "I'm disarming criticism from the negro. You take little pains to disguise your contempt for your former slaves—your only hope of election—"

Blackmar paused, leaned over and whispered:

"Leave this campaign to me. I'll nominate you for Governor on the first ballot. And you'll be elected."

His voice was so warm and convincing, his whole man-

ner so sincere, that he disarmed both suspicion and anger. Hawkins beamed with his dream of power and the two men were soon deep in their discussion of the coming convention and the handling of its delegates.

Craig had paused a moment at the gate and still stood in somber brooding as Blackmar came out of the front door. To avoid an encounter, he quickly entered the lawn and turned to the right toward the family vault. He took his seat on a rustic bench. To his surprise the visitor did not pass out the gate but slipped around the house into the back yard. He wondered vaguely who it might be and again the idea of a guard flashed through his mind. It was a possibility after all. He would move with caution.

As his eye wandered over the moonlit lawn memories of his childhood began to flood his soul. Beneath these trees he had spent the happiest days of life—the charmed life of the old régime. He could see now the slender form of his mother moving among its boxwood walks directing the work of her slaves.

He had not been there since the day her body was carried from the hall and laid to rest in the family vault in the corner.

The Craig house had always been a show place in the town of Independence. Built in 1840 by John's grandfather Robert, the eccentric son of Colonel John Craig of Revolutionary fame, it was a curious mixture of Colonial and French architecture. The French touches were tributes to the Huguenot ancestry of his grandmother.

The building crowned the summit of a small hill and was surrounded by ten acres of trees beneath which wound labyrinths of walks hedged by boxwood. Its shape was a huge, red brick rectangle three and a half stories in height with mansard roof broken by quaint, projecting

windows. On three sides porches had been added, their roofs supported by white colonial columns. The front door, of pure colonial pattern, opened directly into a hall of baronial dimensions, at the back of which a circular stairway wound along the curved wall.

The attic story was lighted by the windows of an observatory. From the hall one could thus look up through the galleries of three floors and the slightest whisper from above was echoed with startling distinctness. The strange noises which the negro servants had heard floating down from these upper spaces had been translated into ghost stories which had grown in volume and picturesque distinction with each succeeding generation. The house had always been "haunted."

The family vault in the corner of the lawn was built of solid masonry sunk deep into the hillside. Its iron doors which were never locked opened through a mass of tangled ivy and honeysuckle climbing in all directions over the cedars and holly which almost completely hid its existence.

Tradition said that Robert Craig had loved his frail Huguenot bride with idolatry and, anticipating her early death, had built this vault, a very unusual thing in this section of the South. It was whispered, too, that he had dug a passageway from the house to this tomb, that he might spend his evenings near her body without the eyes of the world to watch his anguish. Whether this covered way was a myth or a reality only the Craigs knew. No one of the family had ever been known to speak of the rumor either to affirm or to deny it.

On the day of his mother's burial John Craig had found his father sitting in the door of the vault, dazed. The Major was a man of quiet, courteous manners, deliberate in his habits, a trained soldier, a veteran of the Mexican

War, conciliatory in temper, and a diplomat by instinct. He had never had a quarrel with a neighbor or a personal feud.

The longer John Craig brooded over this tragedy tonight, the fiercer grew his hatred of Hawkins. Something had happened in the hall the day of his mother's death which had remained a mystery. Aunt Laura, who stayed with the new master of the house as his cook, had told John that she had heard high words between Hawkins and the Major, and, when she was called, found her mistress dead on the floor and his father moaning beside her.

Craig had always held the theory that Hawkins had used insulting language to his mother; his father had resented it, and the Judge, taking advantage of weakness from a long illness, had struck him a cowardly blow. The shock had killed his mother, and rendered his father mildly insane. Experts had examined the Major's head, before his commitment to an asylum, however, and failed to discover any pressure of the skull on the brain. Yet Craig held this theory as firmly as if he had been present and witnessed the tragedy.

He rose from his seat, walked to the front entrance of the house and looked at his watch by the bright light which streamed through the leaded glass beside the door.

He retraced in part his steps, followed the narrow path to the foot of the hill and entered the vault. Feeling his way along the sides to the arched niche in the rear, he pressed his shoulder heavily against the right side of the smooth wall forming the back of the niche, and felt it give. The rush of damp air told him that the old underground way was open.

He smiled with satisfaction. He knew that this passage led through a blind wall in the basement of the house and up into the hall by a little door in the wainscoting

under the stairs. He stood for a moment in the darkness of the vault and muttered:

"I'll do it—but I prefer the front door. I'll try that first."

A few minutes later he had reached the house, rang the bell and stood waiting an answer.

Aunt Laura's black face smiled him a hearty welcome.

"Come right in, Marse John, honey, an' make yo'se'f at home. I sho is glad ter see ye!"

Craig walked across the hall and sat down on the mahogany davenport under the stairs behind which he knew the door opened. He reached back carelessly, touched the spring and felt it yield.

Aunt Laura came after him.

"Fore I pass de time er day I mus' tell ye, Marse John, what de Jedge say. He give 'structions ter all de folks dat ef any Craig put his foot ter dat do', ter tell 'im he don't 'low you inside dis yard. I tells ye, so's I kin tell him I tell ye. Cose I can't help it dat you brush right pass me an' come in, can I, honey?"

"Of course not, Aunt Laura."

Her figure shook with suppressed laughter.

"De very idee er me keepin' de baby outen dis house dat I carry across dis hall in my arms de day he wuz born! An how's ye been, Marse John?"

"About as usual, thank you, Aunt Laura— How are you?"

"Poorly, thank God, poorly—"

"And he gave orders to admit no one of the tribe of Craig inside the yard again?"

"Yassah."

"Tell his Honor that I am here and wish to see him at once."

"Yassah, he won't come down—but I tell 'im, sah."

She climbed the stairs to the Judge's room. Craig heard the quarrel between them. Her voice loud, shrill, defiant, insolent, above the Judge's. She served him for his money and her love for the old house, but secretly she despised him as she did all poor white trash and in such moments made no effort to hide her feelings.

"Bully for Aunt Laura!" Craig chuckled.

When she returned, he slipped the last piece of money he possessed into her hand and smiled.

"Keep it for good luck," he said.

"Yassah. De Jedge say he be down as soon as he dresses—he all dress now but he des want ter keep you waitin'."

"I understand," said Craig with a laugh.

"Dar he is, comin' now," she whispered, hastily leaving.

Craig kept his seat in sullen silence until the footsteps of his enemy had descended the stairs and crossed half the space of the hall.

The younger man rose and gazed at him a moment, his eyes flashing with hatred which he no longer tried to mask.

The Judge halted, moved his feet nervously and fumbled at the gold watch chain across his waist. His eyes sought the floor, and then he suddenly lifted his head, approached Craig, and extended his hand.

"I bid you welcome, young man, to the home of your ancestors. In fact, I'm delighted to see you. I thought that you would probably call this evening, and had the servants illuminate the house in your honor."

"Indeed!" Craig sneered.

"I've wished for some time that I might have an opportunity to talk things over with you."

Craig had turned from the proffered hand and seated himself with insolence.

"Thanks for the illuminations in honor of my family."

The sneer with which he spoke was not lost on the Judge. His patronizing, judicial air, so newly acquired, wavered before the cold threat of the younger man's manner. Yet he recovered himself to say:

"My boy, I like your high spirit, but I must give you a little fatherly advice—"

"Seeing that my own father at present cannot do so."

The Judge ignored the interruption and seated himself with an attempt at dignity.

"Mr. Craig, you must recognize the authority of the courts—"

"Which means you?"

"I was compelled to make an example of your insolence—"

"You disbarred me from personal malice."

"I disbarred you for contempt of court."

Craig rose and confronted the Judge.

"Well, you're on solid ground there, your Honor. Were I the master of every language, past master of all the dead tongues, a genius in the use of epithet, words would still have no power to express my contempt for you!"

Hawkins shuffled his big feet as if to rise.

"Sit still!" Craig commanded. "I've come here to-night to demand of you two things."

"You're in no position to demand anything of me!" growled Hawkins, running his hand nervously through his heavy black hair.

"Two things," Craig went on evenly. "Revoke your order and restore me to my law practice to-morrow morning."

"Not until you apologize for your insolence."

"That's what I'm doing now. I profoundly regret the

incident. I should have kicked you from the bench. Insolence was an error of judgment."

Hawkins shambled to his feet, trembling with rage, pulled nervously at his beard and gasped:

"How dare you insult me in my house!"

"It's my house!" flashed the angry answer.

"Your house?" the Judge stammered, again tugging at his beard.

"Yes, sit down."

The astonished jurist dropped into his chair, his eyes dancing with a new excitement.

"Your house, your house—why, what—what!"

"Yes, and you're going to vacate it within two weeks."

The cutting tones of command with which Craig made his demands had thrown Hawkins off his balance from the moment the encounter began. He tried to pull himself together. He had nothing to fear from such bluster. He turned on Craig suddenly and demanded:

"Just what do you mean, sir?"

"This," Craig quickly replied, "that the distinguished jurist who aspires to the governorship of this state and the leadership of his party in the South is living in a stolen house. It is with pleasure that I brand you to your face—coward, liar, perjurer, thief!"

Craig paused to watch the effect of his words on his enemy. The cold sweat began to appear in the bald spot above the Judge's forehead, and his answer came with feeble emphasis.

"I bought this house and paid for it—"

"Exactly," sneered the younger man. "But I never knew until I got this letter—" he drew the letter from his pocket—"just how you came to buy a house which cost fifty thousand dollars for so trifling a sum of money—"

"Who wrote that letter?" interrupted Hawkins.

"Evidently a friend of yours, once high in your councils, who has grown of late to love you as I do. And I think he could put a knife into your ribs with as much pleasure."

The Judge winced and glanced nervously into the galleries.

"Don't worry, your Honor. If you take the medicine I prescribe, the knife will not be necessary. Let me read the letter. It's brief but to the point:

"To John Craig, Esq.

"Dear Sir: The secret of Hawkins' possession of your estate is simple. Under his authority as a United States marshal, he ordered its confiscation, forced his wife to buy it for two thousand eight hundred dollars, at a fake sale, which had not been advertised, and later had it reconveyed to him. His wife refused to live in the house, sent her daughter to school in Washington, and died two years later from the conscious dishonor she had been obliged to share. A suit brought before the United States Supreme Court will restore your property, hurl a scoundrel from the bench, and cover him with infamy.

"A Former Pal of His Honor."

"An anonymous slander!" cried the Judge.

"Yet he expresses himself with vigor and accuracy, and his words are backed by circumstantial evidence."

Hawkins sprang to his feet.

"Will you leave my house? Or must I call an officer to eject you, sir?" Hawkins thundered.

"A process of law is slow and expensive, Judge," said Craig with a drawl. "I haven't the money to waste on a suit. May I ask when you will vacate this estate?"

"When ordered to do so by the last court of appeal, sir!"

Craig looked his enemy in the eye and slowly said:

"You are before the last court of appeal, and it's judgment day."

"I understand your threat, sir, but I want to tell you that your Ku Klux Klan has had its day. The President is aroused. I'll order a regiment of troops to this town to-morrow. Dare to lift the weight of your little finger against my authority and I'll send you to the gallows—"

Craig took a step closer.

"When will you vacate this house?"

Hawkins grasped the back of his chair, trembling with fury.

"The possession of this estate is the fulfillment of the proudest ambition of my life—"

"When will you get out?"

"And my daughter has just returned from Washington, a beautiful, accomplished woman to preside over it—"

"When—will—you—get—out?"

"When ordered by the Supreme Court of the United States—or when I'm carried out—feet—foremost—through—that—door!"

The Judge choked with anger.

"Then, until we meet again!"

Craig bowed with mock courtesy, walked across the hall to the alcove and took his hat from the rack where Aunt Laura had hung it, as Claudia sprang through the rear entrance with a joyous shout, reached at a bound the Judge's side and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh! Papa, what a glorious night! We had such a ride!" The Judge placed his hand on her lips and whispered:

"My dear, there's some one here—"

She glanced over her shoulder and saw Craig fumbling

his hat in embarrassment, while Hawkins whispered the name.

"The famous Mr. John Craig? Introduce me, quick!"

"Not to-night, dear; I do not wish you to know him."

Claudia released herself and with a girlish laugh walked boldly over to Craig, her face wreathed in smiles.

"Mr. Craig, permit me to introduce myself, Claudia Hawkins. My father has just forbidden it. I care nothing for his old politics—shall we be friends?"

She extended a dainty hand and Craig took it stammering incoherently. Never had he touched a hand so warm and tender and full of magnetism. It thrilled him with strange confusion.

Never had he seen a vision of such loveliness. An exquisite oval face with the lines of a cameo, cheeks of ripe-peach red, a crown of unruly brown hair, and big brown eyes shaded by heavy lashes. Her dress was the perfection of good taste and careful study—a yellow satin, trimmed in old lace that fitted her figure without a wrinkle; dainty feet in cream-colored stockings and bow-tipped slippers that peeped in and out mischievously as she walked; and a personality which riveted and held attention.

He stared at her a moment, dumb with wonder. Could it be possible that a girl of such beauty, character and appealing manners could have been born of such a father!"

"As the new mistress of your old home, let me bid you a hearty welcome, Mr. Craig," she said softly. "You must come again and tell me its legends and ghost stories?"

The Judge shuffled uneasily and cleared his throat with nervous anger.

"Now keep still, Papa! I'm going to make this house ring with joy and laughter. I won't have any of your

political quarrels. I'm going to be friends with everybody, as my mother was—they say she was a famous belle in her day, Mr. Craig."

"So I have often heard," he answered with increasing confusion, as he retreated.

"You will come again?"

"I hope to soon," he gravely answered as he bowed himself out the door.

CHAPTER V

EQUALITY

AS CRAIG passed through the gate, Blackmar was still in the back yard in conversation with Julius. Since emancipation Julius had changed his name from Julius Caesar Craig to Julius A. Postle. He had professed sanctification and became a preacher of the higher religion among the colored people. From religious leadership his eloquence had led him to political visions. His following among the emancipated slaves was large. Blackmar had heard him preach and saw his possibilities. He had cultivated him carefully.

Enraptured with the new doctrine of social and political equality which the pilgrim from the North had so convincingly set forth, Julius slipped his arm around Blackmar and insisted on leading him to a seat in the kitchen where they might continue to converse of things divine.

Laura looked up from her cooking in amazement as Julius led Blackmar through the door with a pompous bow. He found a chair and seated the carpetbagger with ceremony.

The dusky wife watched the performance in rising wrath. She dropped a pan with a crash, walked over to Blackmar, placed her hands on her ample hips and said:

"Who axed you inter my kitchen?"

Blackmar bowed.

"I came at Brother Julius' invitation."

"Den you kin git—at Sister Laura's invitation!"

"Look here, 'oman—" Julius protested.

Laura ignored the interruption.

"Will yet git out or mus' I fling ye out?"

Blackmar bristled.

"How dare you insult me in this manner?"

Laura surveyed him with scorn.

"I ain't nebber tried ter insult ye yet—ye low-life, poor-white, carpetbagger trash fum de North—tryin' ter live wid niggers!"

Blackmar shrugged his shoulders, and his face took on an expression of soul weariness.

Julius rushed to his rescue.

"He live wid me, 'oman! He's my equal and I'se de Lawd's sanctified one!"

Laura faced Julius with scorn.

"Yes, eatin' de Jedge's bread an' plottin' wid dis ole carpetbagger ag'in' him—dat's sanctification!"

Julius lifted his head with pious elation.

"I walks wid de Lawd in de cool o' de mornin'—"

Laura grinned.

"An' go buggy ridin' wid de debbil in de cool o' de evenin'!"

She turned from her sanctified husband with a gesture of contempt and faced Blackmar.

"Git out!"

The carpetbagger ignored the insult.

With a sudden spring she seized him by the throat, dragged him to his feet and hurled him through the door into the back yard.

Julius was dumbfounded at the sudden attack. He stood in helpless stupor for a moment, then followed his friend into the darkness and apologized for his unregenerate spouse.

He promised Blackmar to thrash her for the doings of the night, if it was the last act of his apostolic career.

He slipped his arm through the carpetbagger's and under the friendly cover of the night walked the whole distance to his rooms arm in arm. The two figures had scarcely turned the first corner of the street when Henry cautiously opened the kitchen door, slipped in, closed it, thrust his hands under his arms, squared himself and shouted:

"How's dat, my true love?"

Laura threw him a look of scorn.

"Ye po' fool nigger!"

"Doan ye like my style, gal?" Henry asked sadly.

She shook her head:

" 'Tain't no use, man. Befo' de war you wuz my lawful wedded husban' and I wuz true to ye. An' den ye let ole Julius beat ye. He won me in a fair fight. I despise er coward. I can't see dat red vest. Ye got ter beat Julius up befo' I takes ye back. An' de quicker ye do it, de better I'll love ye—"

"Ah, honey, leave dat fool Postle an' come wid me—"

"I done tole ye my terms, man!"

Henry glanced sadly at his vest, buttoned his coat over it and moved to the door. He paused, looked back and spoke with conviction.

"All right, den, I'll lay fer 'im. I'll kill de ole hypocrite— I'll kill him *dead*—"

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW BIRTH

JOHN CRAIG had entered the gate, his heart filled with bitterness and hatred. He passed out with a strange feeling of joy. He felt himself a conqueror. Yet he had only met final defiance from the Judge.

As he walked slowly toward his office the contradiction of his feelings with the facts struck him as funny. He laughed in spite of himself, turned and walked back to the gate. He stood watching the lighted windows with a curious feeling of detachment from his habits of thought. He no longer remembered Hawkins as his enemy, the man who had stolen his inheritance. He could only think of him as the father of the radiant girl he had just met. He couldn't reconcile the two facts—the child—the father.

His mind refused to dwell on the ugly life of the father. He could only see the girl extending her hand to greet him. Her voice was music. The memory of the touch of her hand set the blood tingling to the tips of his fingers. He recalled that he had unconsciously held it as they parted at the door—held it until she looked down and smiled. And he had blushed like a schoolboy when he suddenly let it go.

Yet she hadn't resented it. She said good night with a smile. How beautifully she fitted into the hall! She had been born to live in such a home. The fine old furniture seemed to have been made for her. He was glad for the moment that she was its mistress.

Her voice had strangely moved him. He knew why,

now that he had thought it over. There were low tones in it exactly like his mother's. His eyes slowly filled with tears. Bitterness melted from his heart and he felt the first throb deep within his being of a newborn manhood—the new being, born of love. He had not realized it yet, though the conviction was slowly growing that the whole current of life had been changed by the events of the night.

He turned from the gate with a smile and walked rapidly to his office. Logan saw the change that had come over him and his grim face warmed with a smile.

"You win!" he cried.

"Sure—" was the prompt rely.

He hastened to correct the impression his answer had made.

"I win, Ben," he went on soberly. "But the victory was not over the Judge. It was bigger. It was over myself. I've seen a new light. I've decided that life's too short for hate. It's just long enough for love and helpfulness. I'll not waste any more of it—"

Logan heard his voice drift into silence and said as he scratched his shaggy head:

"I don't exactly know what you're talking about, Chief—but by the look in your eye, there'll be no raid to-night—"

Craig nodded.

"No. Not to-night."

Logan turned to the white-robed figures.

"Take off your things, boys, and go home."

The men quickly obeyed. As they started to the door, Craig lifted his hand.

"Just a minute—"

He spoke quietly as the men halted.

"To-morrow night I want the full Klan at Inwood early—mounted and armed."

The countryman frowned and looked at his Chief in wonder, hesitated a bare moment and then gave the order.

"Ride to-night and call the Klan to Inwood at eight o'clock to-morrow."

The men answered with a military salute and filed out of the door. Craig pressed the hand of his faithful partisan, but gave no explanation of his order. He loved the test of faith. He watched him go with a feeling of pride and tenderness. Life was worth living with the faith of such men lighting the way. He made a new vow to be their loyal leader by the highest standards of truth and right. His lips met in a movement of stern resolution. It would be hard, sometimes—this new way in which he had set his feet, but he would not look back. The shadows slowly lifted and a tender smile crept into his eyes. He saw no longer his faithful followers, but the face of a laughing girl upturned toward his.

CHAPTER VII

A SLIGHT ERROR

WITHIN two hours after Craig's call on Hawkins the news had spread. It was the principal topic of conversation in the barber shops, the drug stores and hotel lobby. Speculation as to its meaning varied from opinions that he had surrendered by an apology to predictions that he had thrashed the Judge.

The one man to whom the news brought genuine distress was George Wilkes. That Craig had met Claudia was a certainty. The thought of it made him ill. Not that he really feared Craig as a rival but Claudia was headstrong. He had never been sure of her. He could rely on the Judge to show Craig the door. But if the girl wished to torture him by a flirtation with his rival she had the daring to do it in spite of any wish of her father. He was putty in her hands.

Wilkes made up his mind to put his standing to the test. He was getting tired of Claudia's coldness. It was all well enough, this maidenly reserve. But he had begun to get the impression that she was playing with him. It cut his vanity. It was an insult to his sense of social importance. A girl of her poverty had no right to treat the richest man in the county with such high manners.

The moment he could leave the court room he hurried to call on Claudia. The hour was unusual—twelve, noon —but the matter was urgent. He wouldn't wait. As he walked briskly up the graveled roadway to the house, he paused once with a premonition that he might be mak-

ing a mistake to call on her unannounced at such an hour. His pause was brief. It was nonsense. Ceremony at such a time between two people engaged to be married! He had the right to call when he pleased.

He walked firmly up and rang the bell. It was answered by Maggie, Claudia's little coal-black maid. She walled her mischievous eyes at Wilkes in a most annoying way that upset him.

"Tell Miss Claudia I'd like to see her a few minutes," he announced.

Maggie lowered her eyes and watched him out of one corner as she slowly obeyed his command. Wilkes was not popular with servants. He had a quick brutal way of giving orders that rubbed a negro the wrong way.

Maggie made no answer. She merely climbed the stairs, watching the young lawyer slyly.

Two minutes later he walked over to a mirror and adjusted his tie. He was nervous. She was keeping him waiting longer than was necessary. At least she might send an answer at once. She was doing it to tease him, of course. He made up his mind to get even when they were married. Her social ambitions were the forces that would give him victory. It took money to make them worth while. He had the money. He smiled with the consciousness of power.

Of course, he had taken her mild pretension of love with a grain of salt. She was too young and beautiful to take herself or life seriously. His fortune had been the magnet that drew her. He was content. He would make her love him in due time.

Yet as the minutes lengthened he grew angry and uneasy. He made up his mind to assert his rights with dignity—and yet with a firmness that would leave no question as to who was going to be master in his house.

He decided to nip Claudia's acquaintance with Craig in the bud on the spot.

When Maggie at length reappeared, she was grinning with more than usual cunning.

"Miss Claudia say she be down in a minute," she said with a giggle.

"You've been gone a half hour," Wilkes answered frowning.

"I spec' I is," observed Maggie, continuing to giggle and glance furtively at Wilkes.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nuttin.' "

He held up a quarter and beckoned. She hastened to his side.

"I want us to be good friends."

She took the money, grinned again and said:

"Yassah!"

"Now, what have you been giggling about?"

"Mr. John Craig wuz here last night!"

"So I hear. Did he see Miss Claudia?"

"Deed he did. Dat's what dey all come fur. She so purty dey can't he'p it."

"How long did he stay?"

"Till atter midnight."

"Indeed!"

"Yassah!" Maggie went on, walling her eyes with tragic earnestness. "She play de pianer fur 'im long time in de parlor, an' he sing fur her an' den she sing for him."

Wilkes cleared his throat angrily.

"Yassah! an' atter dey git froo singin' she take him out fur er stroll on de lawn an' dey go way down in de fur corner an' set in one er dem rustics fur 'bout er hour. Den dey come in an' bof un 'em set in de moonlight in de hammock right close side an' side, an' he talk low an'

sof, an' she laugh, an' laugh, an' hit 'im wid her fan—jesso! Yassah. Sh! She comin' now!"

The girl darted out of sight as Claudia's dress rustled in the hall above.

Wilkes pulled himself together with an effort, and met her at the foot of the stairs, an entrancing picture as she slowly descended the steps. The flowing train of her cream-colored morning gown made her look taller than she was.

With a smile she welcomed Wilkes and he attempted to kiss her. She allowed him to kiss her hand.

"Claudia, dear," he began with an accent of offended dignity, "you must quit this foolishness. We have been engaged three weeks and I've never touched your lips."

She laughed and tossed her head.

"Not yet married," she observed, lifting her brows.

"I have honored you with my fortune and my life!"

"Thanks," she interrupted, smiling.

Wilkes flushed and went on rapidly:

"Really, my dear, the time has come for a serious talk between us."

She seated herself at the piano and ran her fingers lightly over the keys. He followed, a frown clouding his smooth forehead.

"Will you hear me?" he asked.

"Certainly!" she answered, turning on him her brown eyes.

In their depths he might have seen a dangerous light had he been less absorbed in himself. He only saw a smile lurking about the corners of her lips which irritated him the more.

"I understand that John Craig called on you last night?"

"I hadn't heard it," she answered lightly.

"And stayed until after midnight."

Claudia sprang to her feet, looked steadily at Wilkes, frowned, walked to the door and called:

"Maggie!"

The black face appeared instantly.

"Yassum!" she answered with eager innocence.

"Have you said anything about Mr. Craig's visit last night?"

Maggie walled her eyes in amazement at such an outrageous suspicion.

"No, m'am! I ain't open my mouf. Has I, Mister Wilkes?"

"Certainly not," he answered curtly.

"I thought I heard your voice in the hall," Claudia continued, looking sternly at Maggie.

"Nobum! 'Twant me. I nebber stop er second. I pass right straight on froo de hall—nebber even look t'ward Mr. Wilkes."

"You can go," was the stern command.

"Yassum," Maggie half whispered, backing out the door, her eyes traveling quickly from Wilkes to her mistress.

"As my affianced bride," he went on firmly, "I cannot afford to have you receive the man who is my bitterest enemy."

With a smile, she quietly removed the ring from her hand and gave it to Wilkes.

"Claudia!" he gasped.

"The burden of being your affianced bride, I'm afraid, is too heavy for my young shoulders."

"Forgive me, dear!" he pleaded.

"I prefer to receive my friends without consulting you. When I need a master to order my daily life, I'll let you know.

"But, Claudia, dear—"

"Please!"

"I—I only meant to tell you that I love you desperately—that I'm jealous and ask you not to torture me—you cannot mean this, dear?"

"Don't address me in that way again!" she cried with anger.

Wilkes tried clumsily to take her hand, but the steady light in her eyes stopped him without words.

"You may go now—" she said.

With a muttered oath he turned and left. As his figure disappeared through the front door, a little black face peeped from the alcove and giggled.

CHAPTER VIII

HIDDEN RICHES

CRAIG awoke on the morning after the eventful encounter with a strange feeling of elation. His fortunes were never at quite so low an ebb. His living had been snatched from him without warning. Yet his spirit was singing a new song of life. Somewhere, in the labyrinth of things, his hand had touched a spring that opened new windows to views of a world he had never seen before.

It was a joy to be alive and strong. He had never before felt so alive—nor so strong. But the things that called for the use of his strength seemed different as he lay in his bed and stared wide-eyed at the dingy ceiling. Yesterday his soul had given a mad cry for revenge as he read the anonymous letter that put Hawkins in his power. Yesterday, the one supreme purpose of life had been to kick this scoundrel out of his house and take his place as its rightful master. Yesterday, when this unscrupulous rascal abused his powers as a judge, and struck him a blow below the belt, he had shouted for joy that the secret order of hooded men whom he commanded could wreak on Hawkins the judgment of God. The thought of this revenge had given him the satisfaction which a cannibal feels who prepares to eat his foe.

And now none of these things seemed worth while. They were foolish and futile. A waste of the strength which he felt throbbing in every nerve and muscle of his body. Life was too short for hate. It was too short for revenge.

Hate is poison for the man who cherishes it. No matter what the outcome. It hurts the man who nourishes it worse than it can possibly hurt its object.

He wondered vaguely what had come over him to show this so clearly. And then he laughed at his pose. Of course he knew. It was all on account of the light he saw in the eyes of a beautiful girl. He had seen girls before. He was thirty years old and still a bachelor. Yet, now that he thought it over, he had never before really looked deep into the eyes of one. War had claimed him in the morning of life, just as he had begun to lift his head and take in its wonder and beauty. And after war had come the ashes and the poverty.

That he was really in love with this exquisite girl who moved with such grace in his home was, of course, absurd. Real love could not come in a flash—a moment's touch of a hand. It might grow from such a meeting, yes.

He had heard the vague rumor that the Judge's daughter was engaged to Wilkes. Such engagements in the South meant only the challenge to a better man to break in and take his own. The idea of a fight with Wilkes over such a prize was far more interesting this morning than an attack on her father. Come to think it over, an attack on her father, after meeting the girl, had become impossible.

The one thing that must be met at once was his financial situation. He had been in debt almost every day since he landed at home after the war. He managed to pay some of his obligations. His law practice was slowly increasing without much increase in fees. The people had no money. They were as poor as he. He couldn't refuse to take a case when he knew this. Ten dollars in cash was about the limit of his collections in most cases. But the number of his clients had grown

in the past year. He had expected at this session of the court to catch up and have a few dollars in bank for once since the war.

The Judge's act of disbarment had left him a pauper, with his office rent unpaid for two months and his board bill in arrears. He could not collect from clients when he was no longer a lawyer.

Yet in spite of his dilemma he rose from his bed whistling an old tune he hadn't hummed since he used to go fishing, a bare-foot boy. He'd find a way out. The way had flashed into his mind with the first gray streak of dawn. A bird singing in a magnolia tree in the yard across the street had waked him. He hadn't gone to sleep again. Something inside of him kept singing with this bird.

A little further down there was another little yard in which a magnolia tree bloomed before the door of a modest cottage. A rose garden was carefully tended in front of this home even through the month of December. The yard was sheltered by the house from the north winds and was protected on either side by the walls of two stores built flush with the sidewalk. Many a time had he seen old Nathan Klein watering these flowers.

People called Klein "old Nathan," not because of his great age, but because of the stoop to his shoulders that gave to his figure the appearance of age. In reality he was not more than fifty-five.

Something in the man's voice yesterday, after the exciting scene in the court room, had haunted Craig's mind. Something unusual in warmth and tenderness. Klein had always been his friend. He was the one client on his list who promptly paid his fees. But there was more than a friendly client's greeting in the way he had spoken to him. He wondered vaguely what it was. His father

had been on the friendliest terms with old Nathan. Now that he recalled it, he had always purchased his supplies at the Klein store in preference to others. For that matter many people had. He kept the best store in town. His profits were modest. And he had a way of making friends of his customers.

Nathan had told him if he needed a friend to let him know. His mind had been fixed since dawn on that speech as the possible way out. Besides, his curiosity was piqued by the mystery of his sudden interest—almost fatherly—in his personal fortunes. He would go to see him before he left his house for the store.

Craig dressed and hurried to his boarding place to get an early breakfast. His landlady would be surprised at this. He was usually the last man at the table. He walked leisurely through the streets. It was a glorious morning of the first days of Indian summer. The cool air was wine in his lungs. His eyes sparkled with its tonic effects.

The town seemed more interesting than he had ever realized before. Its wide sleepy streets, fringed with shade trees, called back the memories of childhood. The old sane life of peace and conservative thinking which these streets expressed took on a new meaning. He had forgotten it in the stress and anguish of the new era. His mind began to pick it up again. War had destroyed the foolish economic system of the South and he was glad of it. Slavery had been the inheritance of the ignorance of a thousand years. The slave owner of 1861, as a rule, was sick of it before the clash came. He knew that it was a failure as a system of labor, compared to the wage system of the North. But the thing had been saddled on him by the past. He couldn't get rid of it. When it had been blown to atoms from the cannon's mouth, the

average southern slave owner thanked God it was over and bravely faced the future.

But there had been in that old life more than slavery. Slavery, in fact, was the poorest thing in it. The gentleness of real men and women, the fine sense of honor and fair dealing, the love of open field and sea, the passion for beauty and reality always alive underneath the pomp of surface ceremonies, were traits of character no war or crash of systems could touch. He felt the surge of them in his heart this morning. He began to realize that he was thirty and yet had not begun to live. He had been merely playing with life. And the conviction grew in him that he had been playing with its most dangerous passions, forgetting the perfume of flowers and the song of birds.

There was time to begin a real life. He would begin. He remembered the wistful face of Sammy, the lame boy with the dog, who had become his partisan in the court-room farce of yesterday. He stopped in a candy store and spent the last dime in his pocket for a package of red stick candy. It was the best the shop carried.

He paused among Nathan's rosebushes for a moment and drank their perfume. A red bird flashed his scarlet wing above his head and a blue bird twittered on a limb just before him. Strange that he had not seen these things before in the whirl of death and blood of war or the insane fears which followed. They were all there. The roar of cannon had not driven a single mocking bird from his home. The flowers were still blooming. The grass was still growing in the fields. He laughed at the folly of the old man of yesterday. He recalled it now with the feeling that they were strangers.

The boy was eagerly waiting at the door to welcome him. Keen young eyes had seen him enter the gate. The

dog had heard the latch click, stood on his hind legs, looked out the window and barked a welcome. Sammy marveled at his sense. He was certainly a smart dog to recognize the friend who had stroked his head but once. But he did. The wag of his tail was proof positive of his intelligence.

"Come right in, Mr. Craig," the boy cried eagerly. "Father and mother are still at breakfast but they'll be glad to see you."

"Thank you, Sammy," the lawyer smiled.

"Now, Sport," the boy said to the dog, "right up to Mr. Craig and tell him how much you like him—come on, *right* up!"

The dog advanced, wagged his tail, looked up at Craig's friendly smile and, with a sudden bound, leaped from the floor, scrambled up his tall figure to his shoulder and nudged his ear.

Craig stroked his head and laughed.

"You taught him this, Sammy?"

"Yes, sir. He'll do that for anybody he likes."

The dog kissed his visitor's ear and pressed his head against his, to the delight of his young master. Craig lifted him gently to the floor, took a piece of candy from his pocket and held it before Sport's shining eyes. The dog promptly stood on his hind legs, waltzed around the room and back. He barked softly.

The boy pressed close.

"Put it on his nose and make him hold it for orders, sir—"

Craig placed the piece of candy on the dog's nose and said:

"Hold it!"

Sport promptly settled on the floor, his front paws

up and drooping toward his body, his eyes set, his nose still.

The boy darted into the dining room and brought his father and mother. They both pressed the young lawyer's hand with eyes shining an unusual welcome.

Nathan held his hand.

"My house is honored this morning by your call, my friend. We bid you welcome—"

In the greeting, Craig had forgotten the dog. Sammy watched him proudly as he held his position with rigid muscle.

The boy pulled Craig's sleeve.

"Look, did you ever, in all your life, see anything like it?"

"He's a great dog—" was the warm response.

Craig stooped with Sammy, watched the dog a moment, and said:

"Take it."

Sport promptly snapped the candy and wagged his tail for more. The boy caught him in his arms and hugged him. A tear glistened in his wistful eyes. He was too full of pride to speak.

His mother touched his arm.

"Come, Sammy, we'll leave Mr. Craig to talk with father. You can help mother."

The boy promptly followed her into the dining room, tenderly stroking the dog's head.

Nathan hastened to offer Craig a chair and drew one for himself close beside him. The lawyer decided to go straight to the point. He cleared his throat to speak and found the task a little harder than he had anticipated. The inheritance of pride from generations of sensitive men and women was not a thing to be brushed aside in a moment.

He closed his jaw in firm decision, pulled himself together and began:

"Nathan, you said something to me yesterday in a way that led me to feel that you were not speaking mere words, as a friendly client—"

"I was not," Klein promptly interrupted.

"Something in the tone of your voice brought me here this morning. The Judge's order has ruined me. I'm in debt. I haven't a dollar—"

Craig paused. Old Nathan's head had suddenly drooped from his stooped shoulders. Craig watched in surprise. Surely he could not be hedging so quickly when put to the test. He was not left long in doubt.

When the Jew lifted his head his luminous deep eyes were filled with tears. He leaned close, took Craig's hand, stroked it thoughtfully and a smile lighted his face. The lawyer was struck again with his remarkable resemblance to Hoffmann's Christ. The eyes, the lips, the thin beard, the gentleness of his personality made the impression uncanny in its appeal. He held Craig's hand before he spoke.

"Now, my boy," he began slowly, "I'm going to tell you something. Years ago in Poland—it don't matter how long—it seems an eternity when I think of it—I lived in a humble little cottage in the outskirts of a village. We were as happy, my Sarah and I, as two young married lovers had any right to be. God had been good. We had a daughter and a son. They grew daily in strength and beauty. My work was hard but I sang at my tasks. And then the black day dawned—"

He paused and a look of anguish overspread his gentle face. He shook off the ugly vision and went on evenly:

"The Cossack raiders had warned me to go. But I had clung to my home. It was mine. I had bought it

with the sweat of my brow. They came under cover of the night. And when they left the wreck, our daughter lay dead amid the ruins, and my boy was a cripple for life—"

Again he stopped, cleared the lump from his throat and continued:

"I took the limp body of my son in my arms and knelt with his mother in prayer. I asked God to lead me, the God who had led my fathers through the centuries. And he heard my cry. The vision came to my darkened soul in a blinding flash. I rose and spoke to the mother, still stunned by a grief too great for words:

"Mother, we go to free America—the hope of the world!"

"Yes, Nathan," she breathed softly.

"Slowly the light dawned in her soul. The new ambition had fired me with courage. We lifted up our heads and turned our faces to the west. By God's good fortune we landed in this beautiful Southland among its birds, its flowers, its green fields and sunny skies—its friendly people—"

Again he stopped and looked into Craig's face.

"Especially have I cause for thanksgiving for its friendly people. When we reached the village, its hills looked homelike—the kind of hills I had seen in my boyhood in the Old World. The immigrant always stops at such a sight. Besides, we could go no further. We had spent our last cent. As I trudged up the main street carrying our little lame baby, I saw your father's home crowning the hill at the end of the road. Something in its quiet, stately beauty called us. Its white pillars shining through the deep green shadows beckoned us. Its doors looked friendly—"

His voice died away in a dreamy smile at Craig.

"You were away at school then. I remember—we paused at the gate and both of us smiled. We timidly entered and walked along the rose-bordered way to the door. Slaves were singing at their tasks in the garden and birds from bush, tree and hedge. A strange peace came into my soul as I stood at that door and waited the answer to our ring. The smiling face of an old negro butler welcomed us. He had the air of the grandee of the Old World. With a stately bow he asked us in. We were dusty and travel-worn. It was evident that we were very poor. But in the name of his generous master he welcomed us. He knew his master.

"In a few moments both your father and mother entered the hall and grasped our hands. Your beautiful mother took our little crippled boy in her arms, looked into his wistful eyes and kissed him. She hustled the wife and baby off into the dining room and ordered breakfast. It was just about this time in the morning. We had arrived but a half hour before.

"Your father slipped an arm about me and spoke slowly.

" 'Refugees—from—Poland—I welcome the children of Kosciusko to the land he helped to free—' "

Nathan paused, lifted his head and a look of reverent gratitude overspread his face.

"And then I knew that our long journey had ended and we were at home—"

He stopped suddenly and looked at Craig through his tears, rose quietly and said:

"I thank God for this hour, my son!"

He walked to the fireplace, pressed the clock aside, removed a brick from the chimney and drew out a little tin box. From it he took a roll of bills which he held a moment thoughtfully.

"Your father took me into his library and placed in my hands five hundred dollars. I gazed into his kindly eyes in amazement. I had never seen so much money in my life. My hand trembled. He pressed the money deep into my palms, closed my fingers over it and said:

"This will give you a little start, my friend. When you are on your feet you can return it to me."

Old Nathan smiled.

"They say we only have what we give. There's just five hundred dollars in this roll of bills. As I give it to you this morning I feel rich for the first time in my life—"

Craig pressed Klein's hand. There was a lump in his throat. His lips wouldn't move at first. When he found his voice he said:

"If you'll give me a pen and ink, I'll write my note—"

A faint smile played about the Jew's mouth.

"Do you think your father asked of me a note?"

Craig slowly answered.

"Perhaps not—but times have changed, Nathan—"

"But the eternal things of Life and Death that make human character never change, my son—"

"I insist," Craig pleaded.

Nathan shook his head.

"Your father asked of me no note. He took my word, the word of a broken refugee, alone in a strange world, penniless, friendless. Your word is good enough for me."

CHAPTER IX

THE PARADE

THE noise of Hawkins' act of personal malice in the disbarment of Craig had spread in a night. The crowds in attendance on court the opening day carried it to every nook and corner of the county.

As early as nine the next morning while the young lawyer was still in conference with Klein, stern-looking men began to knock at his office door. More than fifty had called before ten, and each one of them represented groups of grim-visaged followers who stood talking on the sidewalks or lounging in Courthouse Square.

Long before the hour for the Judge's appearance, the Sheriff was in anxious conference with his deputies. He didn't like the looks of the crowd. And it was equally plain that they didn't like the looks of the Sheriff. He tried to swear in a hundred new deputies. He could find but two men who would act. He had the right to summon every able-bodied man in the county if a breach of the peace was attempted. But it was no use summoning men who might turn their revolvers on him.

He found himself in a ticklish situation. The Judge had but few friends in the county and they could not be depended upon in a fight. In the crowd that packed every inch of space in the courtroom he saw Logan standing just behind the bar rail, with a group of quiet-looking men huddled close about him. He particularly didn't like the way these men were grouped. He was

sure that Logan had at least two loaded revolvers in his pockets.

When Hawkins finally appeared and the Sheriff cried his command for the silence and respect due the bench, he listened for a yell of derision. But the Judge ascended his platform in silence. He was smiling now with the courage that had been his inheritance. He came of a race of eagle-beaked birds of prey and in the open he was not afraid. The certainty of this fact was the subtle force that held the hostile crowd in silence before he reached the courtroom. The night before in his stolen house, confronted by the man whom he had wronged, he had been at a disadvantage. Courage couldn't count against the moral force of his enemy's position. Craig had made him feel for the first time that he was a scoundrel. The consciousness made him ill at ease. He recalled his lack of aggressiveness with a sense of shame. He would like to have Craig attempt to enter the bar rail and defy his order. He would show him now who was in the saddle.

As Hawkins glanced over the hostile crowd his physical courage flashed in answer. With a scowl he turned to the Sheriff and spoke with venom.

"Mr. Sheriff, arrest the first man who attempts the slightest interruption of the Court's work this morning. I'll give him thirty days in jail—"

The Sheriff nodded. His eye was fixed on Logan. He had seen his right hand slowly move toward his pocket as the Judge took his seat.

There was no response to the challenge. Respect for courts and the orderly process of law had always been a characteristic of southern countrymen. It was this trait of character that made the Civil War inevitable. The northern rabble led by the Radical Abolitionists

had said: "To hell with the Constitution!" They finally burned it in a public square. And from the day this spirit gripped the North, the South began to arm. The clash was irrepressible. The southern armies had been crushed. Garrison, Phillips, and John Brown, the leaders of the men who had burned the Constitution, had been acclaimed heroes and martyrs. Yet, deep down in the Confederate soldier's soul he knew that he had fought for law and order. He knew that he had done his best to make good the faith of his fathers.

This reverence for law was woven into the fiber of southern character. It was the one thing that saved Hawkins from a limb in the Square now.

Yet it was no reflection on his physical courage that he knew this. He had proclaimed a new era. He had shouted from the housetop that old things had passed. If this sullen crowd should take him at his word, they might hang him. He had weighed that too. And still he glared into their faces with defiance.

Fortunately for all, Craig did not enter the court. The crowd about his office kept him busy. Through every hour of the morning until one o'clock he stood at his desk, greeted his friends and sternly refused every suggestion of violence.

The devotion of these men had been a revelation to him. His life was worth a great deal more than he had figured yesterday. The faith which they had shown in his character had moved him profoundly. His responsibility to them took on a new aspect. He felt it as never before. He would be true to its obligations.

As the afternoon wore on and nothing happened, a rumor spread that the Ku Klux Klan would hold a great parade through the town that night. The Klan had not paraded since the day preceding the last election, which

had resulted in the overthrow of the Reconstruction government and the restoration of control of the state to the intelligence of the country.

If they paraded, as rumored, it would be for some serious reason. Few men on the street doubted what such a parade would mean. It could mean only one thing, a demonstration in force against the man who had dared to abuse his power as a judge to strike a personal enemy. That they would call at the Judge's house was a certainty. What would happen before the call was over was the serious question.

Hawkins' open defiance of the Klan, and his proclaimed purpose to destroy it, were the main planks of his political platform. He expected to be named for Governor by his convention for his courage in taking this stand. There could be no retreat, no hedging, no compromise. He must meet by force of arms any attempt to intimidate him. And at the first clash of force his death would be a certainty.

As the session of the afternoon wore on, the silence of the court room got on his nerves. He could fight in the open, but these white-robed raiders might be planning his funeral at that moment. The thought of it finally got him, and he suddenly adjourned court.

Wilkes confirmed his worst fears.

"There's a rumor that the Klan is going to hold a parade here to-night, Judge—"

Hawkins' eyes narrowed to two pin points and the blood slowly mounted to his face. Wilkes saw his excitement and hastened to add:

"Pay no attention to such bluster. They won't dare lift a finger against you."

"Certainly not," Hawkins snapped.

He turned on his heels, hurried home, loaded two shot-

guns and placed them handy in his room upstairs. He tested the lock on the door to see if it were secure, and took a drink of whisky.

"Damned sneaks and cowards," he muttered as he filled his glass the second time. In spite of the "Dutch courage" which the whisky gave, he felt his knees grow weak at the thought of a call from these marauders. There was no way really to meet such an attack. It could not be foreseen. They could always strike when least expected if they meant him mortal injury. The trouble was, it didn't matter what their intentions might be, the man in command of such a force could not control them if one excited fool should take matters into his own hand. How could men with any sense dare to set in motion such an irresponsible mob!

By nightfall the Judge was pleasantly drunk and, in the reaction from his first feeling of courage, he was becoming maudlin with fear. He locked his door and went to bed after giving orders that he should not be disturbed.

As night drew on, the crowds on the streets increased. A long stream of horses and vehicles poured in from the country along every road. The throng that had been in town all day had swollen in size until it jammed the sidewalks and Square, and overflowed into every street.

Women and children now outnumbered the men as they stood craning their necks watching for the first signs of the parade. Speculation was rife as to what it meant and what the Klan would do.

Their meeting place had been well guarded and only a privileged few saw the men donning their robes in the ravine below the ruins of Inwood, some four miles out of town. The approaches were guarded by sentinels mounted on fleet horses.

On the hill crest just outside of the Inwood estate, the commander of the sentinels stood with an orderly hidden in the foliage behind him. His horse, draped gracefully, with white-hooded rider erect and alert, was silhouetted sharply against the moonlit sky. The hood he wore fitted the head closely and a sharp spike rose fourteen inches high from the center of the crown. His robe had been made with care. The picture suggested a crusader of the Middle Ages.

He lifted his hand and the orderly spurred his horse to his side. He gave an order and the white horseman swung swiftly away into the shadows.

The children of the town were in high excitement. The Klan was the one great spectacle they could remember. It had been six months since they had seen a parade. The fever of its memory now fired their imaginations. The tension of nerves which the mystery of the Klan provoked was contagious. It gripped the grown folks. It held the children in a spell.

Sammy Klein and his dog were the center of a group of excited youngsters on the sidewalk in front of his father's cottage. The lame boy was a favorite with the children. His vivid imagination, his generous nature, his cheerfulness in suffering, his desire to make others as happy as he was himself, had made him the friend of every boy and girl of his age in town.

When the first rumor of the parade swept the children, Sammy built a rude tier of seats for his friends on the edge of the sidewalk. It was made of goods boxes which he had gotten from the store.

The last seat had been taken by the eager spectators before two little negroes whom he knew edged in. The older one whispered:

"Kin we see too, Sammy?"

"Are ye scared?" the boy asked.

The negro swallowed and rolled his eyes.

"Yassah, we skeered all right—but we gwine ter see it er bust—"

"All right, come on," he called cheerfully. He found a box for the older one, and told him to stand on it. The younger one he lifted to a keg on end and made him sit down. The little negroes grinned their gratitude, and the white children, perched in the improvised grand stand, laughed.

A boy from the top seat cried:

"Better run, nigger, run, de Ku Klux catch yer!"

"Dey git you, too, I spec'—" the pickanniny on the box answered with another grin.

Sammy patted his head.

"Stand your ground, Cicero. It's all right, we'll be with you when they come."

"I don't believe they're comin'," grumbled the boy on high.

"They are, too!" a chorus shouted.

Behind the grand stand a boy of nineteen stopped to hug a girl in the dimly lighted space. The girl struggled, drew his arm away and slapped his hand.

"Quit it, I tell you—"

"Ah, what's the matter?"

She glanced over her shoulder.

"Somebody's watchin' us—"

The boy threw a quick glance in the direction indicated and saw Lowery's bead eyes fixed on them. His ugly features broadened into a grin as he waved his big hand.

"Go as far as you like, son!"

"Come on," the girl whispered.

"Who is the ape?"

"Sh—for heaven's sake, come on," she urged.

The boy obeyed sullenly and looked back to see if they were followed.

"I'd like to bounce a rock off his skull—do you know him, girlie?"

"Yes," she faltered. "It's Berry Lowery. He's the ugliest, meanest skunk in the county. He's been to see me twice. The last time he came I slammed the door in his face and he stood outside and cursed me for half an hour—I'm afraid of him."

They disappeared in the crowd, the boy muttering threats against the tough.

The excitement of Robinson's Circus was the only occasion like it. The whole town and country lined the streets—men, women and children. The one difference between this and the circus parade was that the negroes kept in the background. They knew instinctively that a mere parade meant no harm. But the Klan was held in terror. The pranks played by boys arrayed in its disguises had excited their superstitions. Here and there a curious black face peeped through the curtains from an upstairs window. Here and there one could be seen peering from the shadows behind a hedgerow. In the main they were conspicuous by their absence.

Sammy's grand stand burst into cheers, shouts and laughter. Little Bobby Glaser, four years old, dressed in full Klan costume, suddenly stepped into the street before their astonished gaze. His mother had humored his fancy and stood in the background smiling.

The youngster lifted his tiny hood and held it in his hand. He was afraid his audience would fail to recognize him. With a pompous gesture he began to speak in imitation of the southern orator's 'worst bombast. He stamped his foot, beat his breast and gesticulated

wildly. The crowd cheered and laughed. The little pickaninny on the keg was too sleepy to join the applause. He had waited long and patiently for the parade. It had not come, and he had settled comfortably against the post supporting the shed over the sidewalk and fallen asleep. Through all Bobby's harangue he peacefully slumbered. Once he nodded so low he all but fell, caught himself in time and settled back against the post.

The longer the young orator ranted, the louder and more eloquent he became. His flow of words was unending. Sammy was in high feather. His entertainment was a success, Klan or no Klan. In low tones he urged the speaker on.

"Keep it up, Kid—keep it up!"

The mother's face was wreathed in proud smiles. She was firmly convinced that her eloquent son had his chance for the presidency.

Along the hill crest with its moonlit background of fleeting clouds, the procession slowly moved toward the town. They marched two abreast in a line that seemed endless. They descended the hill, wound slowly along the crooked road through the valley and up the grade toward the hills outside of Independence. When the head of the procession had climbed the first hill outside the town, the white winding line was still pouring along the hill crest beyond the valley.

Suddenly the throngs on the streets stopped in their tracks and craned their necks down the street. A low murmur had swept from the edge of the town to its center.

"They're coming!"

There were no shouts, no cheers, no demonstration. A tense silence held them.

The noise of the grand stand was hushed. The orator

subsided, resumed his helmet and walked out into the street to greet his fellow Klansmen. He strutted proudly. He still held the center of his stage.

The little negro on the keg nodded. The one on the box stretched his neck to the limit. As Sammy passed he spoke in a whisper:

"Dey won't hurt me, will dey, Sammy?"

"Of course not," was the prompt reply.

"Dat's what I say," he agreed doubtfully.

A tow-headed boy ventured into the street, looked down the roadway and yelled:

"Gee, bucks—look out—they're comin'!"

He dashed back to his seat and settled down. Bobby, the boy orator, was talking to his mother and lost this announcement. When he strutted back into the street, he was looking the wrong way through the eyeholes of his hood and didn't see the procession until the two leaders were close on him.

He turned at the clatter of hoofs and saw. What he saw was more than his child mind had figured. The horses were as big as elephants, the white-robed figures, stiff and erect on their backs, were giants and the spikes in their helmets shot into the sky out of sight. He stood his ground for one terrible moment. Somewhere in the dim spaces of the world he heard his mother's voice calling, but he couldn't locate it. He decided to go while the going was good. He broke and ran for life, his mother after him, calling frantically. He got home first and was deep under the bed when she arrived.

The tow-headed boy found his voice first.

"Gee Whilikins—there's a million of 'em—" he breathed, as they began to pass.

The little negro on the box stood bravely for a moment until the line stretched, an endless river of white

as far as his eyes could reach, up street and down, and faded into the shadows of the infinite. Then he suddenly dropped from his box and pulled it over him. They might kill him but he determined not to look on at the massacre. The dusky little bundle beside the post was still nodding.

A subdued cheer had greeted the leaders as they rode past the courthouse. There was no demonstration in the streets. The crowds stood silent and tense with an undercurrent of uncertainty and excitement. The only sound as they passed the children's grand stand was the muffled beat of hundreds of hoofs in the soft dirt of the unpaved street.

To avoid any accident Sammy picked up his dog, held him tight under his arm and took his place beside the little negro's keg. The dog eyed the disguised horses and men with suspicion. An instinct, subtle but unerring in its processes, told him that a man in disguise was a devilish and dangerous thing. It was the same curious power of knowing that enables a dog to feel an earthquake coming before the shock is felt. Man with his slow powers of reason has no such faculty.

He growled and Sammy put his hand over his mouth. In the excitement, as the parade swept past, the boy forgot the dog and his hand slipped from his mouth. Two rows of white teeth gleamed at the disguises and an angry bark suddenly broke the silence of the crowd. The bark echoed straight into the ears of the little negro nodding on the keg. He opened his eyes and saw. The whites of his eyes gleamed in the moonlight. With a single movement he rolled off the keg, pulled it after him and dived into it.

As the head of the procession reached the Hawkins' gate, the Judge from his darkened window looked out, and, to his horror, saw Claudia standing at the gate.

His heart pounded at the thought of a possible insult. Half drunk as he was, he dismissed the idea as absurd. She had nothing to fear. Her youth, beauty and charm would protect her. For his own skin he was not so sure. He took another drink. When he came back to the window he saw to his amazement that she was waving her handkerchief gayly toward the leaders.

She put her feet on the lower rail of the picket fence, drew herself as high as possible and waved her handkerchief again. The leader reined his horse, lifted his hand, blew a whistle and the long line halted—an endless river of white that wound through the streets and far into the shadows of the moonlit road outside the town.

As Hawkins peered through the curtains he was not sure that Claudia's signal had halted them. The thing was that they had stopped at his gate. For hours he had been picturing such a possibility with foreboding. He was not afraid of any man in a fair fight. He wouldn't acknowledge now that he feared these night riders. Yet he felt a chill in his heart. What could any man do when attacked at night without warning by a gang of masked cutthroats?

It was infamous. With an effort he threw off his fears, slipped two pistols in his pockets and placed the guns within reach. They might get him. He would get some of them.

He watched the little drama at the gate with increasing surprise. The leader, tall and erect on a fine horse, rode close to the gate and tipped his helmet in response to Claudia's salute. He turned and waved to his orderly. The orderly saluted, faced the line and lifted his hand.

Hawkins raised the window and listened. He could distinctly hear the words:

"Three cheers for the girl at the gate—she's all right!"

A rousing cheer swept the white line, echoing and re-echoing through the streets and far out into the country road. Three times it was repeated. The leader bowed to Claudia. She waved again and the procession moved on.

Hawkins lowered the window, and wiped his brow with a sigh of relief. He put up his guns and placed the pistols back in the bureau drawer.

CHAPTER X

THE CLASH

IT was more than an hour before the crowds swarmed from the sidewalk into the street and watched the last white-robed horsemen disappear in the shadows of the country road.

As the long line cleared the town, the rear guardsman blew his whistle. The call echoed for two miles along the river of moving men. The head of each squadron caught the call and passed it to the next until it reached the leader, who answered with the signal for full speed. The entire line with the precision of trained cavalry broke into a gallop.

The steady thunder of thousands of hoofs echoed through the stillness of the night. No other sound could be heard. The houses passed were darkened. Excited women and children stood beside the windows and watched in awe. Such a procession of Klansmen had not appeared for so long people had grown to believe that they would not be seen again. Speculation as to the meaning of such a formidable line was in vain. No one understood it. That it might be aimed at the scalawag judge was the best guess. It had remained a guess. There was not a man in the ranks who could give the least hint of its meaning. There was but one man who knew and he rode at the head of the line.

The procession passed at a quick gallop through the forest of Inwood. And then down the dim aisles of great

trees, lit by moonbeams, they slowly wound their way to their rendezvous.

They assembled in the wide open space before the ruined house. The six tall white fluted columns of the ruins stood shimmering ghostlike in the full moon's rays, sharply outlined against the cedars in the background. Through vines and underbrush their classic solemn beauty gleamed its pathetic message of the fine old South.

The main line of the procession had broken ranks inside the gates of Inwood and from there on through the great trees the procession had become a white flowing tide that swept toward the ruins. The men knew that a meeting of unusual importance had been called. The Grand Council would meet in the basement of the ruins, still intact, though covered by piles of brick and marble which had fallen in heaps when the house had been burned.

This basement of the ruined home had been the secret meeting place of the Councils of the Klan since its organization, eighteen months before.

The hum of whispered comment grew gradually into full speech. The consensus of opinion was that the Council would decree Hawkins' death and that he would be executed before dawn.

"He'll get his—"

"The damned scalawag!"

"No more than he deserves—"

"Good riddance for the state!"

The swiftness with which these death sentences were passed on a man who had not yet been arraigned or tried by any tribunal was a startling revelation of the condition of mind in this remarkable organization.

When the last wave of the white tide had rolled into the open space before the pillars, they filled it, a com-

pact mass of men and horses, which overflowed far into the shadows of the trees.

The picture was uncanny. The ghostly figures stood stark still. Only in the center of the throng was there a slight movement about the leader. The whistle of an orderly rang the sharp call to dismount and disrobe.

For a moment there was no response. To dismount, yes. They had expected that. But to dismount and disrobe—it was unheard of. The two signals had never before been given together. The astonishment was profound. The leader repeated the call.

And then, slowly, yet with military precision, they dismounted at the same moment. Their horses were quickly hitched in the woods and the men gathered in an excited mass around the leader. The astonished crowd saw that he had removed his helmet and stood beside the Chaplain explaining to him a ceremony about to be performed. They had dismounted at the signal, but it was too much to expect them to disrobe until they knew what it was all about.

The better informed among them were also astonished to see that the leader to-night was John Craig himself, the Grand Dragon of the State. It was the first time he had ever appeared at the head of a parade. Something big was on foot. A wave of excitement swept the ranks. A subdued cheer greeted Craig. He stopped it immediately.

He moved to the base of one of the pillars of the ruins and the men swarmed about him. He struck a match and held it while the Chaplain read as witness an order which he held in his right hand.

Wilkes pushed his way through the crowd with Anderson, a politician who had come to an understanding

with the rich young lawyer on the next campaign. Wilkes glared at Craig and nudged Anderson.

"He thinks he'll beat us with the Klan!"

"No, that's not his game," Anderson answered.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. We'll see in a minute."

Logan had unmasked and stood on one side of Craig with the Chaplain on the other. In striking contrast to the fine spiritual lines of the face of the minister were the deep-cut wrinkles in the countryman's strong but homely countenance. The flicker of the match in the preacher's hand threw a sinister light on the grim visage. Every man in the crowd who knew him was sure that his hand was gripping a pistol butt. He had been Craig's orderly and Klan messenger since its organization.

The Chaplain smiled, handed the order back to Craig, dropped the match and lifted both hands above his head in signal for prayer. In the bright moonlight he could be seen from his elevation at the base of the column by every man in the throng.

With uniform precision each man removed his helmet and stood with uncovered head while the Chaplain in a few words invoked the blessing of Almighty God on this important gathering of his people assembled.

The moment the prayer ended, the men began to whisper at the extraordinary character of the meeting.

It was Anderson's turn to ask of Wilkes:

"What the devil *is* it all about?"

"You can search me," Wilkes sneered.

An eighteen-year-old boy, flushed with excitement, pressed up to Anderson.

"Why don't we make the raid?"

Anderson smiled and waved toward Craig.

"Ask the boss."

From all sides came the question.

"What's this?"

"What's the matter?"

"What'ell?"

"Who's dead?"

"You're too many for me!"

The youthful raider pressed Wilkes.

"Say, what's up?"

Wilkes threw up his hands.

"It's beyond me, sonny. The Grand Dragon of the state honors us with his presence to-night. You must ask him—have a drink."

He passed a flask to the youth who drank and handed it to his companion.

Craig mounted a pile of stones beside the pillars and the crowd pressed close.

"Gentlemen," he began evenly, "you have assembled here to-night for the last time as members of the Invisible Empire—"

He paused for his announcement to be grasped. It was several seconds before it landed. The sensation was profound. First incredulous, then surprised, then angry, the crowd swayed and stirred. Exclamations mingled with curses greeted the announcement. "Dissolve? Like hell we will!" The crowd split rapidly into groups and each group had its prompter. Wilkes saw the turn of the tide with a smile of triumph. His chance to give Craig a knockout blow was at hand. He would deliver it without hesitation. Craig had thought himself something of a politician. Any fool would have known better than to try to dissolve a great secret order in the moment of its triumph. These men, a moment before, were ready to commit murder at the crook of his finger.

Now with a little urging they might hang him to the nearest limb.

Wilkes congratulated himself on his brain prowess as well as his good looks. In a flash he saw his sure victory. He would ride the new tide straight into the District Attorney's office, Congress and the United States Senate. The men who stood by him would reap their rewards in accordance with their ability.

Wilkes nudged Anderson.

"How about it?"

"It's too good to be true," his friend laughed.

"I've always told you Craig was a fool—"

The disorder had increased until the meeting was fast becoming a mob.

Craig lifted his hand, and in sharp tones commanded silence. A few of the younger hotheads continued to mutter for a moment and then something in the tall tense figure beside the fluted pillar of the ruins riveted the attention of every man in the crowd. They pressed close once more.

"The white race, my friends," Craig continued with increased emotion, "has been restored to its position as the guardian of your civilization. To accomplish this purpose the Ku Klux Klan was organized. It was a desperate remedy for a desperate situation. Its method was secrecy. It was forced under the conditions to use a disguise—a thing repugnant to every brave man. We had to do it. We were circled by the bayonets of a victorious army. Our courts of justice were closed. The white race had been disfranchised and the negro, guided by traitors and carpetbag adventurers, were set to rule over us.

"We rose in a night and seized this dangerous weapon. With mask and revolver we hurled our oppressors from

power and sent the negro to school where he must stay for a hundred years of training. Order has been restored. Your legislature has been purged of thieves. A new Governor is in your Capitol. The courts of justice are open. Our work is done—"

"No—no!" a boy of eighteen shouted.

"No!" Wilkes cried.

"No!" Anderson growled.

The crowd, thus prompted, took up the cry and again a wave of disorder swept the assemblage. For a moment Craig remained silent until the first force of the protest had spent itself. He lifted his hand and his voice rang with the clear note of command. Even Wilkes forgot to mutter.

"Listen, men!" he commanded. "We have used in this disguise a power too sinister and dangerous for the future. Who among you is wise enough, strong enough, to be intrusted with its terrible responsibility? I am not. Such power could only be wielded in an hour of supreme crisis by men of the sternest integrity and the highest intelligence. This supreme crisis has passed. The very dangers of that crisis held us together in a bond of unbroken unity. We had to work under the laws of the old empires. One mind was supreme over the whole. One mind was supreme over every state. One mind was supreme over every community.

"Now that the crisis has passed and our civilization has been saved, this stern obedience to authority cannot be maintained. There is no force to maintain it. The members of this secret, oathbound, disguised order will begin to do exactly what each man's fancy dictates. You have shown the lack of restraint in the refusal of obedience here to-night. You have shown that your membership has already begun to deteriorate. Once only the

best men in each community, the best and the bravest could enter. Already the barriers are down. To-night's disorder has shown the type of men recently admitted. I have forbidden the admission of boys under age. According to your oath every assemblage of the Klan should have given that order implicit obedience. I find a score of boys under age in this meeting to-night. Their silly shouts and cat calls tell the story of your fall from the high ideal which made this dangerous order a possibility for the past eighteen months. If we cannot control our own men now—but six months after our deliverance from the hell which gave us patience and wisdom—who can foresee the end a year from now when every whisky-drinking rowdy, every silly youth and every dangerous fool in the country have been admitted?"

He paused and the more thoughtful men edged closer, the more reckless, surprised at his stern attack, dropped back. Wilkes and Anderson stood their ground awaiting the moment to strike.

Craig felt his renewed hold on the gathering and went on with vigor:

"The disguise we are using is not a thing to be proud of. It is the badge of an insane, crime-ridden era. Its power is too dangerous to be placed in the hands of any man or group of men in times of peace. The temptation to abuse it will from now on become resistless. I have already been asked by bigots to use it as a weapon of religious persecution. Fools have urged me to use it to regulate the private life of individual men and women. Once begun, there can be no end to such criminal folly. Protestant will demand the extinction of Catholic. Gentile will ask for the persecution of Jew—particularly if they are rivals in business. A man in

love with a woman can organize a gang in this disguise, raid and drive out of the county his rival—"

Wilkes suddenly lifted his hand and shouted:

"Wait a minute!"

He saw that Craig had gripped the crowd with his eloquence and unanswerable logic, and unless he stopped him there would be no chance to deal him the blow which he had planned.

Craig paused, folded his arms and waited for his rival to speak. Wilkes stumbled in his opening words but finally got his second wind.

"We've heard enough of this sermon!" he shouted. "It's for *you*—not General Forrest in Memphis, Tennessee, or Mr. John Craig, who poses as the Almighty—it's for *you* to decide whether we wish to dissolve our order. We'll vote on it!"

"Yes, vote!" echoed Anderson.

"Vote on it!" yelled the youths who felt they had been insulted. The crowd caught the spirit of anarchy and took up the cry. Again Craig waited for the first mob impulse to spend itself and at the right moment his clear tones commanded silence. His voice dropped to tense emotional tenderness. It caught them by the throat and subdued them.

"I am going to make a sorry confession to you now, my friends. When I told you just now that no man is wise enough or strong enough to wield the sinister power symbolized in this disguise, I was not talking a vague theory. I was telling you what I know. Yesterday I took stock of my own life. I looked into my own heart and saw the bottom of hell. I was about to use the power intrusted to me to strike a personal enemy. The one man on earth I hated. The one man who had most cruelly and brutally wronged me. I was about to lead

you, in my desire for personal revenge, over the precipice of social anarchy, where neighbor fights neighbor with mask and dagger in the dark. God saved me in time and I am here to-night with clean hands.

"I am your Commander, placed in this position by your will, not mine. I have been clothed by you with supreme power and I am going to use it for your good and the good of this commonwealth. As Grand Dragon of the Invisible Empire, I declare the Ku Klux Klan dissolved in the State of North Carolina, and the use of its name, ritual and disguise forever forbidden."

There was a moment's painful silence.

Wilkes stepped quickly in front of his rival. The veins of his thick neck stood out and his eyes shone ominously in the moonlight. The tall figure of Craig stiffened at the implied threat. He stepped down from the pile of stones and confronted Wilkes.

The aggressor hesitated a moment, got control of his voice and said:

"The Klan, then, is a thing of the past?"

"Yes," was the firm response. "Its work is done for all time. The Klan is history—"

"As if it had never been?"

"As though it had never existed," Craig snapped.

"And your authority is at an end?"

"As an officer of the Klan, yes. As a leader, no."

"The officer only interests me now—boys!" Wilkes' angry voice rang with defiance. "We have just been told by the Grand Dragon that the Invisible Empire is no more. Its officers have passed. Their authority no longer exists. Good. Meet me here to-morrow night to organize a new order of patriots!"

The crowd shouted their approval and threw up their hands acclaiming the new leader. Anderson led them.

Leaping on the pile of stones from which Craig had just stepped, he called to the excited throng:

"Now, men—three times three cheers for our new leader, George Wilkes!"

They gave the cheers and, as the echoes died away in the shadows of the forest, Craig stood confronting his rival in silence, his body trembling with anger. Wilkes' head was high with the consciousness of new power.

Craig thrust his face into his enemy's and said slowly:

"Patriotism may be the last refuge of a scoundrel—"

The words held his rival for a moment dazed by their insulting import. He shrugged his shoulders with an attempt at indifference.

"Well, what do you think you can do about it?"

Craig's fists closed as he stared at his enemy. Logan placed his hand on his Chief's arm and whispered:

"No fight here to-night. These fools are drinking. They're gettin' ugly—"

Craig threw Logan's hand off without glancing in his direction, his eye still holding Wilkes. He squared himself and said quietly:

"Take back that call to these men!"

Wilkes trembled, but he managed to say:

"Like hell, I will—"

The words had barely passed his lips when Craig's fist landed squarely in his mouth and he sprawled on his back. Logan gripped his Chief and held him firmly from further advance. Anderson sprang to Wilkes' rescue and lifted him to his feet. The blood was trickling from his mouth. He quivered with fear, glancing over his shoulder at his enemy.

It was done so quickly, the crowd was awed. The mob had now become a crowd and the crowd recognized its master. Anderson had no difficulty in keeping Wilkes

quiet. No one offered to help him. He led the sorry figure to the outer edge of the open space into the shadows of the trees and talked to him in low tones.

Craig again mounted the improvised stone platform and called the men. They moved in quickly. He no longer argued or pleaded. He spoke with authority. And they listened to their Commander.

"You have sworn, each of you to obey your superior officers?"

They agreed.

"Yes."

"We did."

"Sure."

The answers came from every direction and there was no dissenting voice.

"All right. Until your robes for both men and horses are surrendered to me, I am still your Chief. Deliver them!"

There was the ring of steel in his voice. A bare moment of hesitation—and they began to lay their disguises at Craig's feet. In ten minutes the surrender was complete and a huge pile of Klan robes lay before him. Anderson and Wilkes were the last to obey. Anderson glared at Craig, threw his disguise on the heap and stalked back into the shadows. The eye of the leader followed the movement and noted the position from which the two men were watching the end.

The Chaplain lighted a match, handed it to Craig and the pile of costumes blazed. A breeze stirred the flames and they leaped high into the starlit sky. The glare fell over the crowd of uplifted faces. The horses in the woods turned startled eyes toward the fire and began to neigh uneasily. The men watched the blazing funeral pyre of their order with mingled feelings. Some scowled. Some

smiled and thanked God it had ended. Some shook their heads with puzzled indecision. Craig watched in silence with folded arms, a look of brooding tenderness in his eyes. He saw nothing of the puzzled crowd of his former followers. Only the smiling face of a girl. He heard no bitter comments. There were many. A girl's voice asking him to call again at his old home was ringing in his ears.

As the fire died, he turned to find his horse at his side with Logan at the bridle.

"I wish you'd go home now, Chief. I'll stamp out the embers."

Craig took the reins, nodded and led his horse to the clump of trees beneath which Wilkes and Anderson still lingered. He confronted Wilkes, who moved nearer his friend.

Craig's voice was coldly even as he said:

"I'll be at my office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning to get any word you may wish to send—"

Wilkes was silent and Craig added:

"You understand?"

"Yes—" came the mumbled answer.

Anderson whispered to Wilkes to keep cool. There was no need of the warning. He was already shivering.

Craig deliberately mounted his horse and rode into the shadows alone.

CHAPTER XI

THE OLD WAY

WHEN Craig rode past the Hawkins' gate he reined his horse beneath the friendly shelter of an oak and watched the glimmer of lights from the familiar windows.

The girl whose charm had thrown a spell over him and changed the current of life was somewhere behind the curtains in his mother's room. He was sure of this. Hawkins would give her the best. Of that he was sure. He had seen, in the brief moment when they had met, that the old rascal was putty in her deft fingers. The first thing that had softened his hate was the look of tenderness in her father's eyes. Up to that moment he had only seen them flash with anger or blink with deviltry. The love for his daughter had transfigured the rugged face.

Craig smiled as he thought of this mysterious force that could make anew the impulses of the soul. It had gotten him. He had been born again. It would take time to complete the transformation of the outer man to the new ideal. But it would be done.

And then he frowned at the thought of the challenge which he had thrown at his enemy and the tragic events that might grow out of it. Still, it had to be. He had come of that kind of men. The act was instinctive. He couldn't regret it.

The thought of it brought him back to earth from his dreams. He hurried to the stable, put up his horse and

went to bed. Exhausted from the long nerve strain he quickly fell asleep.

It was a quarter to ten the next morning when he hurried to his breakfast. Logan was standing at the door.

"What's the matter?" Craig asked.

"Just a minute," Ben replied, pressing him back into the office and closing the door.

"What's happened?" Craig cried impatiently.

"Nothin' yit," was the slow answer. His eyes rested on a case of old-fashioned dueling pistols on the desk. He had never seen anything like them before. They had been handed down to the lawyer, through four generations. But the countryman knew what they were for.

"Don't do it—" he said crossly.

"I've got to."

"They ain't no sense in it—"

"Maybe not," Craig replied after a pause. "But it's the only way I can see just now. And I'm going to ask you to be my second."

Logan put his rough hand on his friend's shoulder and looked at him steadily.

"Lemme be first—not second."

"It's not my way."

"That's why I've come early to ax ye. Say, boy, you're the biggest man in the state. I used to say that in the war when you'd get us out of a hole so deep we couldn't see the sky above us. But I seed it last night, as I never did before when ye wuz makin' that speech to the men. You'll be Governor shore ef ye don't do some fool thing like this that'll ruin ye—"

Craig shook his head and Logan went on eagerly:

"Hit's ez plain ez day, I tell ye. Ef ye fight 'im and he kills you—you're a goner—ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Ef you kill him, *you're* ruined, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"What's the use?"

"It can't be helped."

The countryman threw up a hand in a gesture of impatience.

"Are ye goin' ter kill 'im?"

"Yes. The Klan was the only way to save our civilization. I've sowed the wind and now I begin to see that somebody must reap. I saw it all in a flash last night when that scoundrel called the men to reorganize."

"They won't follow him."

"The fools will, and there are thousands outside clamoring to get in. I've kept the young and reckless out as far as possible. Wilkes knows that he can beat me for Congress with this new wild-cat Klan at his back. He hasn't sense enough to see that, the spell of authority once broken, he wields a power no human hand can control. It will be faction against faction, neighbor against neighbor, man against man—the end martial law, prison bars and the gallows. I can save the lives of our men and my state from crime and disgrace by killing this fool as I'd kill a mad dog, and I'm going to do it."

"Hit'll ruin ye, boy!"

"Maybe. But I'm going to do it."

"Look here, do me a favor," Logan pleaded, "leave him to me. My wife's dead and I ain't got a chick or a child. You've defended me many a time without a cent and you're the best friend I've got in the world. It's my turn now. Nobody would miss me—"

"I'd miss you."

The two men silently clasped hands.

"You're a damn fool to do this, boy—" The countryman's voice broke.

"Of course, Ben, many of our old-fashioned ways are foolish—but at least they hold the honor of man, and the virtue of woman, dearer than human life."

A boy opened the door without knocking and handed Craig a note.

He read it aloud with a scowl:

"My friends have decided that I shall not play into your hands by an absurd appeal to the code of the Dark Ages. I'll fight you in my own way at a time and place of my own choosing and with weapons that will be effective.

"GEORGE WILKES."

"Now, by gum, you'll have to leave 'im to me," laughed the countryman.

Craig tore the note into bits and turned to the boy.

"No answer, you can go."

"He'll pick you off some night from behind a tree," warned Logan.

"He's too big a coward even for that—"

The countryman's face was wreathed in smiles as he watched Craig's eyes brighten with a new light. He put on his hat and hurried to the door.

"When ye need me, let me know—"

The lawyer nodded.

"And it'll be quicker than ye think—unless I miss my guess."

The warning was lost on Craig. His mind had quickly swung from trouble into the new world of his dreams.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEVIL LAUGHS

FOR a week Craig wrestled with his longing to see Claudia. He invented excuses to call. They wouldn't hold water. The sensation of Hawkins' act of malice in disbarring him from the practice of law had made his relations with the Judge the chief topic of conversation. A call on his daughter would start every gossip's tongue wagging.

And they would not all wag one way. An attempt on his part to pay court to Claudia might be interpreted as an act of cowardice—that he had taken the shortest way to cultivate an enemy and regain his living.

He couldn't do it. And yet the desire to see her at last became an obsession. He began to bet with himself on the number of days he could hold out. On the first day of the second week he wrote a note to Claudia, read it and tore it up. In a fit of temper he turned back to his desk and drew from a pigeonhole the legal papers containing the evidence which he had gathered of Hawkins' theft of his estate.

The dissolution of the Klan had left him only the process of the law by which to recover it. It was only a question of time when the Supreme Court would oust the Judge from his home and arraign him for impeachment.

Now that he was ready to file the suit, his mind was in a tumult. The hand of a girl was holding his. He gazed at the documents and saw only her face. The ink lines resolved themselves into her glossy hair piled in curling con-

fusion above her white forehead, and he was trying to find the depths of her wonderful eyes.

Something in the expression of her eyes held his memory in a spell—their remarkable size and their dilation when she spoke. They seemed to enfold him in their light.

He bundled the papers, replaced them, and took up his pen.

"I've got to see her—" he muttered. "I'll not throw my chances away for a house, some trees and a few acres of dirt."

On a sheet of old note paper with a crest of yellow and black at the top, he wrote:

"My Dear Miss Hawkins:

"You were gracious enough to ask me to call again. I beg the privilege of coming to-day while your father, my valiant political enemy, is busy downtown with the delegates to his convention.

"I anxiously await your answer."

"Sincerely,

"JOHN CRAIG."

He called Henry and handed the note to him.

"Take that to Miss Hawkins and wait for an answer."

"Down to de ole place?"

"Yes, of course."

Henry laughed.

"Well, now, 'fore de Lawd, don't dat beat ye!"

"Shut up and hurry back. I'll wait for you."

Henry didn't move.

"Yassah—right away, sah—"

"Well, get a move on you—and listen—not a word of this to a living soul—"

"Nasah—'cose not. I know how tiz myself. De course er true love ain't run smooth wid me—"

"Quick now—you fool—don't you stop anywhere and don't you lose a minute—"

"Nasah. I won't stop no whar—"

Craig paced the floor of his office in a fever of waiting. He thanked God that he had thrown the last barrier of hate from his pathway. He had been a fool to hesitate. He could see it now. What did it matter whether the tonques of gossip wagged? Let them wag. If he could win the girl he loved, nothing else mattered. His eyes danced with excitement as he realized that he loved her. He had done the manly thing. He had given himself to the one purpose worth while.

A sense of joy filled him. He was as sure of her answer as if he held it in his hand. His appeal could not fail.

If Henry had only kept his promise not to loiter on the way! But the devil sometimes laughs at the best laid plans of men. The messenger loitered on the way. And with results that changed the current of more lives than one.

Henry placed the note carefully under his hat and hastened to the Judge's, laughing and chuckling.

For reasons best known to himself he entered by the carriageway.

At the wide double gate stood the little lodge-keeper's cottage, a relic of the slave régime. In this cottage, which she called her cabin, Aunt Laura lived with Julius, her latest husband. Henry had once been honored with that position before the war, but Julius had whipped him and taken her by force of arms.

Henry was the larger man of the two, tall, awkward and slow of movement, while Julius was small, but active as a cat. The agility of his movements had swept Laura's imagination. The contrast to her own two hundred pounds had probably been the secret charm.

She had loudly professed her love for Henry until she

saw Julius thrash him, and without a word she surrendered to the new lord and refused to recognize her former husband.

This had happened two years before the war and Henry watched and waited the day of his revenge. Many a night he had prowled around her cottage listening for her cry of help. He heard that Julius was beating her. He approached the gates this morning in a peculiarly romantic frame of mind. He listened and heard Julius' voice within, hectoring it over his former spouse.

He peeped through the keyhole and saw Laura busy at the ironing board, while his enemy sat majestically in a rocker delivering to her a discourse on "Sanctification" and his own sinless perfection. He had lately become a Methodist exhorter and went from church to church holding revivals, particularly appealing to the sisters of the church, calling them to the life of stainless purity of those who had not merely "Salvation," as the ordinary Methodist understood it, but "Sanctification" as only those of the inner circle of the Lord could know it.

Julius declared not only his sinless nature but proclaimed himself a prophet of the new order and fixed his name as "Julius the Apostle," which had been simplified by busy clerks in written form to "Julius A. Postle."

Laura heard of the success of his meetings with misgiving. The majority of his converts were among the sisters. She finally dared to question his apostolic call. Her skepticism aroused Julius to a frenzy of religious enthusiasm. That the wife of his bosom should be the only voice to question his divine mission was proof that she had in some way become possessed of the devil—perhaps seven devils.

He determined to cast them out—by moral suasion if possible—if not, by the strength of his right arm. He must set his own house in order lest the source of his in-

spiration be poisoned by lack of faith. He was devoting the morning to the task when Henry arrived.

He had just finished an explanation of the miracle of Sanctification.

"Fur de las' time I axes ye, 'oman, what sez ye ter de word er de Lawd?"

Laura banged the board with the iron and grunted:

"Huh!"

Julius rose and repeated his question with rising wrath:

"What sez ye ter de word er de Lawd?"

"I ain' heared de Lawd say nuttin' yit!"

"An' why ain't ye?"

"Case you keep so much fuss I can't hear nuttin', Julius Caesar Craig—"

"Doan' you call me dat name, you brazen sinner dat sets in de seat er de scornful. Is ye ready ter repent an' sin no mo'?"

Julius approached her threateningly. Henry watched with bulging eyes, and clutched the stick which he had picked up.

"Tech me if ye dare—I bus' yo head open wid dis flatiron!" Laura cried.

Julius knew his duty now and determined to perform it without delay. The anointed of the Lord had been threatened by the ungodly. He drew a hickory withe from a crack where he had hidden it and approached his skeptical spouse.

Laura began to whimper.

"Put down dat flatiron!" he sternly commanded.

Henry, peering through the keyhole, gasped as he saw her drop the iron on the floor.

Julius raised his switch and began to whip her. Around and around she flew screaming, begging, pleading for mercy. But Julius continued to lay on steadily.

Henry tried to rise and rush to the rescue but he couldn't move. To his surprise the performance fascinated him. He sat peering with satisfaction.

"Dat's paying her back fur leavin' me fer dat low-life rascal. Give it to her, old man. Give it to her. She sho' deserve it!"

Julius paused, and eyed her steadily while he shook his switch with unction.

"I axes ye now, does ye believe in de Sanctification er de Saints?"

"Yes, Lawd, I sees it now!" she responded with fervor.

"An' thanks me fer showin' ye de error er yo' way?"

"Yes, honey. I'm gwine ter seek dat Sanctification myself."

"Glory. We'se er comin' on!"

Laura picked up the flatiron. Julius was too much elated with his victory to notice anything unusual in her manner.

"And ye b'lieves now in de Sanctification er de Lawd's messenger, Julius A. Postle?"

With a sudden flash of her eye Laura hurled the flatiron straight at the head of the Lord's messenger, saying:

"I ain't sed dat yit!"

But Julius was quick. He dodged in time. The flatiron merely tipped his ear and smashed through the window.

He gripped his switch with renewed zeal.

"I see I'se des begun—one debble out, but dey's six mo' ter come!"

Again he whipped her around the room, threw her down, grasped her by the hair and banged her head against the floor.

"Fur de las' time I axes ye, is de Lawd's messenger, Julius A. Postle, a sanctified one?"

"Yes, honey, I sees it now!" she agreed.

"Dat's de way!"

"Does ye lub me fur showin' ye de light?"

"I lubs ye, my honey, yes, I do!"

"An' I'se de only man dat ye ebber lub?"

Henry couldn't wait for the answer. He gripped his stick, sprang through the door, knocked the Apostle flat on his back, and jumped on him. Laura was more astonished than Julius at her sudden deliverance. She scrambled to her feet and gazed in amazement at Henry as he smashed Julius' head against the floor with one hand and pounded him with the other.

At every thump Julius yelled:

"God, sabe me—de debble done got me—save me, Lawd—save me now!"

Henry pounded steadily away.

Laura, when she caught her breath, grasped Henry's arm and yelled:

"What you doin' here, nigger?"

He wrenched his arm loose and hit Julius in the mouth as he cried again for help.

"Git offen my ole man, I tell ye!" screamed Laura, gripping him by the throat.

"Name er God, 'oman, what yer doin' when I comes here ter save ye!" cried Henry, wrenching himself loose and returning to his work on Julius.

"Git offen 'im, fo' I bus' yer open!" she panted, towering above the writhing pair. She began to pound Henry over the head with her fists, but he worked steadily, without noticing the interruptions.

Suddenly Laura threw both arms around his neck, bent his lank figure double across Julius' prostrate form, and hurled her two hundred pounds across the writhing pair. There was silence for a moment and then Julius groaned:

"God save us, we'se all gone—de house done fall on us!"

"Na, honey, it's me," cried Laura, "an' I got 'im in de gills!"

She rolled over and pulled Henry with her—both hands gripped on his throat.

In a moment Julius was on his feet.

"De Lawd hear my cry!" he breathed with unction, pouncing on Henry and pounding him while his spouse held him fast. Henry found his voice at last, and began to yell murder.

Wilkes, who was pacing the walk in front of the Judge's, anxiously waiting to see Claudia, heard the cries and rushed to the rescue. He pulled Julius and Laura off in time to save Henry's shirt and portions of his clothes.

As he entered the cottage, he saw the note in Craig's handwriting which had fallen to the floor. He picked it up and put it in his pocket.

When Henry got out of the door, he did not stand on the order of his going. He struck a bee line for the office and ran without looking back.

Craig was pacing the floor, his heart beating out the interminable minutes.

Henry burst into the room, his nose bleeding, a gash across his forehead, his clothes torn and splotched with the blood from his nose. He was still wild with the fear of death which had strangled him as the light of day faded under Laura's grip on his throat.

He sank panting on a chair.

"For God's sake, Henry, what's happend!" Craig cried, seizing a glass of water and pressing it to his lips.

"Dey kill me, Marse John!"

"Who did?"

"De folks at de Judge's."

"Where's my note?"

"Dunno, sah."

"Didn't you deliver it?"

"Dunno, sah."

"Did you go to the house?"

"Dunno, sah."

"Where did this happen?"

"At de gate, sah, dey wuz layin' fer me. De Judge mus' er tole 'em ter kill me."

"Who did it?"

"Ole Julius and Laura jump on me fust, but tow'd de last dey wuz er dozen. Six un 'em wuz er beatin' me on de head at de same time, three er four wuz er settin' on top er me, two had me by the throat an' de res' un 'em wuz er steady kickin' me in de stummick. Dey'd er had me sho' by dis time ef I didn't kotch my breaf an' holler'd."

"Who helped you?"

"Mr. George Wilkes wuz dar ter see Miss Claudy an' he run in an' pulled 'em off. When I lit out for home I wuz er sight sho nuff. I hear Miss Claudy come up ter Mr. Wilkes an' bust out laffin' fit ter kill herself."

"And you don't know what became of the note?"

"Yassah—cose, sah—dey tuck hit away fum me and tore it up—dat's what I fit 'em 'bout—yassah!"

Craig's face went white with rage. He sent Henry home, sat down at his desk, and drew out the papers which he had laid aside. The Judge had won. He had covered him with infamy in the eyes of his daughter and had dared to do this outrage. And she had joined in the fun. He couldn't understand Aunt Laura's part in it, but the evidence of Henry's plight could not be mistaken.

For three hours with stern, set face he worked completing the case of Craig *vs.* Hawkins. At four o'clock he had entered the suit and an officer served the papers on the astonished Judge.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONVENTION

WHEN Craig read the account of his suit in the little paper which appeared the following day, his heart sank. The language which he had used was savage. In cold print it was unpardonable. His provocation had been great. But he need not have used such epithets in describing Hawkins' rascality. He had dug a gulf between him and the girl that could not be bridged. No matter what the truth about it might be, Claudia would defend her father.

Regrets were vain. With an effort he pulled himself together and hurried to the hall to watch the assembling Radical Convention.

Emboldened by the proclaimed end of the Ku Klux Klan a large delegation had crowded the town. There were so many negro delegates from the Black Belt that they had been housed in tents on the vacant lots in the rear of the building. Blackmar had distinguished himself as their friend in these arrangements. The delegates were massed before the doors.

The blacks outnumbered the whites two to one. The negroes were in high feather. They had linked the end of the Klan with the beginning of a new era of power for their party.

A white fakir was selling Indian medicines and doing a thriving business. Cotton was on the market and the negroes had money. They spent it freely. At one stand

a peddler was selling a remedy for kink in the hair. It was worthless. But the negroes were buying it as fast as he could hand it out. The Indian medicine man was his closest rival. He had a voice like Hawkins. It boomed over the crowd and commanded attention. Every time he sold a bottle he shouted:

"Sold ag'in—got the tin—and ready to sell ag'in!"

He yelled for more customers and they came. Craig, as he passed into the hall, saw Henry buy two bottles of "No-Kink."

The effect of his suit against Hawkins had not only blighted the chances of his love, but to his amazement it had made a hero of the Judge. The scathing recital of fraud made in his complaint was from every point of view a mistake. It had been accepted by the mottled crew who asembled in the convention as proof of his own depravity and the Judge's honesty.

The results of this suit had upset another man's plans. Blackmar was the author of the anonymous letter sent to Craig. He had figured that the scandal produced by it would put the Judge out of the running and he would have an easy task securing the solid negro delegation. He could not foresee the chain of trivial events which produced Craig's terrific document. Every word of its passionate arraignment had the sting of a scorpion. Its effects had been a surprise. The crowd had accepted the suit as a blow at the cause and Hawkins had become their champion.

As the Judge approached, accompanied by Claudia and Wilkes, Craig saw that another effect of his suit had been to bring the two closer together. She had laid aside her hatred of politics to become her father's champion. Wilkes had lost no time in poisoning her mind against him. He had spent the morning by her side developing the

bitter sentences of his complaint into revelations of malignant hatred.

The girl had, however, taken his talk with reservations. She would stand by her father before the world and insult Craig if he dared to give her the opportunity, but down in her heart she half suspected the truth. The dim memory of a feud between her mother and father over a secret connected with this estate and her father's evasions returned to her now with startling import.

Her mother was of the old régime of the South, an aristocrat of aristocrats to her finger tips. Her people had blotted her name from their memory for her marriage to Hawkins. She had resented to the day of her death this ostracism. The fear that her husband was a scoundrel, which slowly grew into a certainty in later years, at last broke her spirit. She gave up the struggle and died.

There were moments in which Claudia felt this repugnance to her father when the spirit of her mother's blood ruled. There were other moments when she felt the necessity of the little tricks and shams that make life agreeable and acepted her father as of the regular order of human life.

This morning she was her father's daughter. Guilty or innocent she would show Craig and his Bourbon set her contempt for them and their opinions.

As the three reached the edge of the crowd she was smiling on Wilkes in answer to a sally of his cheap wit. She fixed Craig with a look of contempt and his soul again grew sick with the certainty that he had paid too great a price for his suit. In her anger she was superb. The air about her was charged with the intensity of her personal feelings. It was this trait which drew Craig to her with resistless power. No other type of woman could interest him. And she was endowed with this magnetism of

person as no woman he had ever met. It spoke in every movement of her body, in every accent of her voice.

As she passed and turned her back on him, the sense of loss crushed him. The words of the preacher rang in his heart, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

With a start he came down from the clouds. She had dismissed Wilkes, taken the Judge's arm, and was going to walk with him down the aisle through a mob of negroes and greasy politicians to the platform. When they reached the crowd seated about the speaker's stand, pandemonium broke loose. The Judge received the ovation of his life. The throng leaped to their feet and yelled themselves hoarse.

"Keep your house, Judge!"

"Houses were built for patriots—jails for traitors!"

The Judge bowed and again the crowd yelled.

Blackmar from the platform watched the demonstration with angry amazement.

"I've miscalculated. They're all thieves. I've made him a hero."

With a smile he seized the Judge's hand, wrung it, congratulated him, and drew him to the platform. Claudia sprang lightly after him, took a rosebud from her belt, pinned it on her father's broadcloth coat, kissed him, and, amid the cheers of the mob, retraced her steps and left the building with Wilkes.

Craig watched her with renewed curses at his folly. He had unconsciously risen as she passed, taken his hat off and stood bareheaded. With an effort he turned back to the Judge and the convention—trying in vain to shake off the impression Claudia had left. His mind constantly wandered from the scene. Wherever he looked, he saw the

delicate oval face with those brown eyes smiling as they did the night he met her in the hall of his old home.

He awoke from the reverie with his eye resting on Blackmar, the Judge's real opponent. He had never seen him before, though his name had become known in every county of the state.

He was a man of more than the average height, of powerful build, high intellectual forehead, a full beard, long, silken, snow white. His hair, also long and white, was inclined to curl at the ends, and a pair of piercing eyes looked out fearlessly from shaggy brows. He carried himself with dignity, and his appearance proclaimed a bold and powerful leader.

Rumor said that he had been a Wesleyan preacher in England but had been expelled in some factional fight and had sought his fortunes in America. Darker rumor whispered that he had a criminal record and that he had never attained citizenship in the country of his adoption. Such rumors, however, counted for nothing in the tainted atmosphere of the Reconstruction period. From the sewers of the North jail birds and ex-convicts had poured into the stricken South in the wake of the victorious army.

In two years Blackmar had proven himself a party leader of executive ability and on the hustings an orator of eloquence. He was becoming the idol of the radical wing of his party. He proclaimed and practiced negro equality and held up to public scorn any man who dared to quibble on the issue.

He had laid siege to Julius on his arrival and had played on his vanity so deftly that the Apostle of Sanctification had been fascinated by the carpetbagger.

The moment Blackmar's eye rested on Julius, seated in the crowd, he saw in a flash the master stroke by which he

could break the spell of the Judge's influence. He threaded his way to the Apostle's side and escorted him to the speaker's stand with an arm around his shoulders. He lifted him to the platform, forced the Judge to rise and shake hands, and seated Julius by Hawkins' side. The negroes broke into applause.

So elated was the Apostle by his newly found honors he began to interrupt the meeting by fervid religious exclamations to the disgust of the Judge, who squirmed with increasing anger at each outburst. When Julius recognized a dusky acquaintance in the crowd he waved a hand and pointed his remarks in that direction.

"Yas, Lawd. De year er juberlee is come, an' I'se here!"

A loud guffaw would answer his sally. Blackmar ostentatiously consulted Julius from time to time as to the conduct of the convention and every negro watched him spellbound.

The Judge's henchmen were dismayed at the impending stampede by the carpetbagger. Hawkins had assured them the night before that they had nothing to fear from Blackmar. It was now apparent that he had been deceived by his wily opponent. Blackmar's commanding appearance, his magnetism and eloquence, the boldness and sincerity of his profession of negro equality were steadily winning adherents.

Personally the Judge cut a poor figure beside him with his vague profession of platitudes.

Hawkins watched Blackmar's betrayal of his promises and sudden growth of power with sullen rage. He had in reserve a weapon found in the carpetbagger's English career, with which he could crush him at a blow, but he had not expected to be forced to use it. For many reasons he wished to beat him in an open fight. The weapon

he could use was a dangerous one. He knew that the carpetbagger had learned of his confiscation of the Craig estate, and he was not sure how far he would go in retaliation for an attack on his character. But he determined to put a stop to Julius' insolence which was rapidly becoming unendurable.

The Judge leaned toward the Apostle and said with a frown:

"Shut your damned mouth and behave yourself!"

Julius subsided with a look of injured innocence directed in mute appeal toward Blackmar.

Again the carpetbagger saw his opportunity. He approached Julius, seized his hand, slipped an arm around his shoulder and whispered:

"Brother, I'm going to call on you for a speech. Will you make it?"

"Dat I will!"

"Then repeat that story of the vision you told me last night, and apply it to the Judge—will you do it?"

"Make de call, an' I sho' ye!" whispered Julius.

Hawkins stared at his opponent while Blackmar smiled at him with contempt.

"I have asked," announced the carpetbagger, "a distinguished leader of his race, Mr. Julius A. Postle, a constituent and neighbor of Judge Hawkins, to address the convention before we begin to ballot. I am sure the convention will give its unanimous consent to hear him."

The roar of applause which greeted this remark left no doubt as to their consent. Blackmar seized Julius and drew him before the speaker's table with his arm affectionately around him.

Julius was in a broad grin and enjoyed his honors. He cleared his throat and glanced at the Judge. The ne-

groes burst into roars of laughter and the Apostle lifted his hand solemnly for silence.

Hawkins shuffled uneasily while Blackmar's face was wreathed in smiles.

Julius lifted his hand for silence the second time, smiled and said:

"Yassah—Julius, de Postle o' Sanctification. De store folks calls it Julius A. Postle—but dat's me!—"

He paused and laughed. The negroes cheered.

"Yassah," he went on with swaying body, "I didn't 'tend ter speak here ter-day, but de Lawd moves in er mischievous way his blunders ter perform. An' so, gemmens, an' feller citizens, I'se called by de Lawd dis mawnin' ter come up on high an' expose de vision dat I seed in de dead er de night las' week. I dreampt a dream. I dream dat I die and go ter heaben. An' as I wuz gwine long up de hill ter de pearly gates who should I meet comin' down de hill but our good frien' Brer Hawkins—"

The Judge gave a sharp angry cough, pulled his long whiskers and crossed his legs. Julius glanced at him and walled his eyes at the dusky crowd, who broke into another roar of laughter.

"Yassah!" he went on, "I met Jedge Hawkins comin' down de hill lookin' pow'ful sad. An' he say ter me:

" 'Julius, whar ye gwine?'

" 'Gwine ter heben,' sezzi.

" 'Ye can't git in,' sezze.

" 'Why so?' sezzi.

" 'Case ye got ter be er ridin', sezze—'I jes come down frum dar—an' hits des lak I tell ye!'

" 'Is dat so?' sezzi.

" 'But I tell ye what we kin do, Julius!' sezze. 'I'll git on yo back an' ride up to de gate, an' we bof git in.'

"Dat seem all right ter me fust off so I hump mysef

an' de Jedge git on my back, an' I gallup up de hill ter de pearly gates an' de angel Gabul look over de fence an' say: 'Who's dar?'

" 'Hit's me, Jedge Hawkins,' sezze.

" 'Ridin' er walkin?' de angel say.

" 'Er ridin'!' sezze.

"An' I chuckled ter myse'f dat I'se er settin' my feet in de gates er glory!

"An' den de angel say:

" 'Des hitch yer hoss outside an' come in!'

"An' bress God! ef de Jedge didn't hitch me ter de pos' on de outside an' go in an' leave me dar!"

The crowd screamed with laughter. Wave after wave swept them while Julius folded his hands across his little protruding stomach and laughed with them. In vain the chairman rapped for order.

The Judge flushed and called a messenger to his side. Blackmar bent his face between his hands, convulsed.

When at length the tumult wore itself out, Julius' voice rang over the assembly in triumphant tones:

"An' I moves yer, sah, dat we all unanimous second de motion er Brer Blackmar fer Governor!"

Amid a shout of approval he sat down.

The carpetbagger, elated by the success of his move, determined to make a bold stroke, capture the entire delegation, and put the Judge out of the race.

He leaped to his feet and launched into an appeal for the equal rights of man. The right of a negro majority to rule the white man of the South, the former slave to rule his master. Bold by instinct, he did not quibble over words. He told the negroes that this hour had come to strike for equal rights by force of arms if need be. He denounced the Ku Klux Klan. Every negro followed his scathing words with breathless attention. For the moment

he was the veritable prophet of the Most High God. Never before had they heard a man on a public platform dare thus to arraign this dreaded order of white and scarlet horsemen. Here was a champion whose valiant soul knew not the fear of man, ghost, clansman or devil. He was transfigured before their eyes into the white-haired prophet of the Lord, and they hung on every word as inspired.

He closed his speech with a sentence that sent cold chills down the spine of his rival:

"A leader of the negro race in broken but sincere words has ventured to name me as your candidate for Governor. If nominated I will accept the honor and when elected I will give to the black his equal rights as man and citizen of this republic."

The last words died away into dead silence for a moment —and pandemonium broke loose. The negro delegates leaped to their feet and yelled. The crowd in the street rushed for the door, poured into the building and jammed the rear lobby and every inch of space inside the hall. For five minutes wave after wave of frantic cheers drowned every effort of a speaker to be heard.

Hawkins seized Blackmar's arm, swung his grinning face around, glared at him and said:

"Stop this farce, you dirty traitor—or you'll live to regret it!"

Blackmar threw up his hands and laughed.

"Stop it? How can I? It's a cyclone."

"All right. I'll see what I can do."

With a sudden leap Hawkins sprang to the edge of the platform, lifted high his right hand and his deep voice boomed in angry commanding tones:

"Gentlemen!"

To Blackmar's amazement there was silence. It was

almost instantaneous. The negro, accustomed to obey the command of a master's voice for centuries, could not throw off the habit in a moment. Only Julius continued to mutter:

"Yassah, I nominates fer de Gubnor, de black man's true friend, Brer Lionel Blackmar—yassah—dat I do—"

Hawkins glared at Julius and he subsided. The Judge had recovered his poise in the silence that followed his commanding gesture. He spoke with an assurance that puzzled Blackmar as well as the horde of stampeded delegates.

"Before we begin to ballot for our candidate for governor, I suggest that we adjourn an hour for refreshments. We have prepared a barbecue in the rear of the hall and the delegates will now eat at the expense of the County Committee. I move that we adjourn for an hour—"

A friend of Hawkins seconded the motion. Before Blackmar could find his voice to oppose it, half the negroes in the hall were scrambling over the seats to get to the barbecue. They could smell the roasting meat through the rear windows.

Hawkins turned to Blackmar with an ominous smile.

"I want to see you at my house at once. You can lunch in my kitchen."

"I haven't time, Judge," was the careless reply.

"I'm in no mood to be trifled with, sir," Hawkins scowled.

"It's a waste of time, your Honor," Blackmar laughed. "You're a back number. Why talk to the dead?"

"There's a reason big enough to interest you. I'll talk here before the Committee if you insist—"

The Judge spoke with a sinister suggestion that was not lost on his rival. Blackmar fixed him with his piercing

eyes and studied the flushed angry face. He hesitated and finally said:

"I'll join you there in ten minutes."

"See that you're not late by one minute, sir," was the stern command.

Hawkins saw him coming up the walk two minutes ahead of time and opened the door himself. He motioned Blackmar to a seat, stood over him and stroked his black beard with deliberation. The carpetbagger moved uneasily. He didn't like the light in his enemy's eye. When the silence became unbearable, with an attempt at insolence he snapped:

"Well—what are we here for?"

"I'm going to ask you," Hawkins began, "to write out your resignation as Chairman of our State Executive Committee, withdraw from the race and make the speech nominating me for Governor—"

The carpetbagger laughed:

"Anything else?"

The irony was lost on the Judge. His answer came in even tones as if he had not caught the challenge.

"That will do for to-day—"

"Well, you *are* a fool," Blackmar sneered. "You low-browed scalawag—what do you take me for?"

"For the criminal adventurer that you are, sir!" thundered the Judge.

The carpetbagger sprang to his feet and faced his opponent. He spoke in tones through which trembled a note of deep emotion. The tremor was not lost on the man who watched him like a great hook-nosed hawk.

"I'll not bandy words with you, Hawkins. I've got you now, just where I want you. Five minutes more of that convention and you'll be a memory as a politician. You never had a principle in your life. A professed

leader of the Radical party in the South, composed of negroes, you loathe the sight of a negro. You profess to be a southerner, yet your ear is always to the ground to hear a whisper from the lowest breed of Yankee demagogues in the North. You lie to the negro, you lie to the southern white man, you lie to the yankee. You're a pusillanimous, office-seeking turncoat beneath the contempt of a man. Why did you send for me?"

"To tell you that it's time for you to move on, sir!" cried Hawkins with rage. "You carpetbag vultures have winged your way into the South to tear from the loyal men of native birth the rewards of their long patriotic services. Go back to the slums and prison pens where you belong!"

"What do you mean?" Blackmar broke in with sudden energy.

"That you are a criminal, sir; that's what I mean!"

Blackmar laughed again.

"Is that all?"

"And I have in my pocket the documents to prove that you have never acquired citizenship in the State of New York."

"True, but irrelevant. I am a citizen now of this state under the Reconstruction Acts, and I'm going to represent the commonwealth in the Governor's chair while you sink into the obscurity your feeble mind has prepared for you. Is this all you have to say?"

"No, sir, it's not!" whispered the Judge with triumphant malice. "I have a letter in my pocket from the warden of the prison in England where you served time, inclosing your photograph."

With a sudden cry of anguish Blackmar leaped the distance separating them, gripped Hawkins by the throat, hurled him back in his seat with the strength of a maniac,

and held him strangling, spluttering, squirming. In a moment he released him, sank to a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"So, I am your master after all?" the Judge sneered.

Blackmar lifted his lionlike head and looked at his opponent.

"Yes, I give up. I'll withdraw from the race if you'll keep my secret."

"I'll make no conditions with you, sir; I mean now to brand you a felon throughout the length and breadth of this land!"

"Not if you've an ounce of manhood in you," said the carpetbagger with quiet dignity. "You can't do it when I tell you the truth. Fifteen years ago I was an honored minister of the gospel in Australia. An enemy of mine in England published a slander against me. I returned to ask for reparation. He not only refused to give it but insulted me by a blow in a public assembly. In a moment of rage I returned his blow with one which resulted in his death. Four months later I found myself, a man of culture, refinement and the highest order of social talents, a convict in a prison garb serving a sentence for manslaughter. I emerged more dead than alive. It was late in life, but I lifted up my head, sought a new world and began over again. Once more I've shown my power as a leader of men. It was born in me—a God-given birthright. My hair is white now with the frost of the grave. I'm alone and friendless. Put yourself in my place. It's my last chance. You are twenty years younger. I ask your pity, your sympathy, your friendship. Come, Judge, you too are a soldier of fortune in conquered territory and have your own secrets. Fight me fair."

"I'll fight you with every weapon in my power. You're in my way; get out of it," sneered the Judge.

When the convention reassembled after lunch the delegates had been well fed. They were in good humor. The negroes were still keen for the renewal of Blackmar's boom, but the sensation he sprang on them as the gavel rapped for order was more profound than the one produced by his speech.

When Julius attempted to take his seat on the platform, Blackmar pressed him into a seat on the aisle among the delegates and told him to wait. The Apostle was dumbfounded. What had happened he couldn't guess. He muttered a feeble protest and watched Blackmar with sad eyes as he rose to speak. The black delegates gave him a "rousing reception" but the carpetbagger's face was an impenetrable mask. He lifted his hand for silence.

"My little demonstration this morning, gentlemen," he began slowly, "has served its purpose. It is yet too early in his political career for the black man to take the lead. He will serve his apprenticeship first. I merely wished to let him know that the power is in his hands and to serve notice on his supposed friends that at the proper moment he will use it. There is to-day but one logical candidate for the Governor's chair—the fearless, honest Judge, who from the bench has hurled his defiance at the enemies of law and order. I move to make by acclamation our choice for Governor, His Honor, Judge James Hawkins!"

He turned, drew Hawkins from his seat to the edge of the platform and shouted:

"Hawkins—Hawkins!"

The convention took up the cry and the new stampede was on. The negroes were quick to climb on the band wagon. They yelled lustily for the man their leader had chosen. Why he had picked him they had no idea. But

he had said yell and they yelled. In a moment the convention was a mass of howling dervishes. The black delegates leaped on chairs. If a chair was not handy they leaped on a neighbor's back. They waved their hands and shouted for Hawkins. After five minutes of shouting they began really to believe in Hawkins' greatness. Ten minutes before they were ready to hiss him. Now they were acclaiming him the greatest man in the state.

In spite of warning, Julius pushed his way into the crowd standing on the platform and asked Blackmar in painful whispers what it all meant. The carpetbagger smiled, winked and told him to be quiet.

The negroes surged forward to congratulate the winner. Blackmar told Julius to lead the procession and shake his hand first. Julius couldn't see it. He sulked and drew back. Blackmar dragged him forward and Julius reluctantly offered his hand to the Judge.

Hawkins' smile died. He glared at the Apostle and said in low tones:

"You go to hell—"

Julius walled his eyes at the carpetbagger in mute acceptance of the insult as the reward of righteousness. In the midst of his triumph Hawkins found time to scribble a note to Claudia and sent it by a negro boy.

She was in the flower garden when it came, broke the seal with trembling fingers and read the message:

"My Darling Girl:

"My nomination was unanimous. The Convention is in a wild tumult of cheering. Sorry you didn't stay to see my victory. It's all for you.

"DAD."

The last words she read through a blur of tears.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW KLAN'S "DEN"

DIAGONALLY across the street from Convention Hall stood a wooden frame store two stories high with gabled roof flush with the front wall. It had been vacant for a long time. The town council refused to allow any more wooden buildings on Main Street and nobody would rent the place on account of the fire risk.

The upper story had been vacant for years. It had been once used as the lodge room of the Odd Fellows. This upper story was reached by a pair of wooden stairs that rose far back from the sidewalk. The darkened entrance made the place an ideal one for secret meetings.

When Craig emerged from the foul atmosphere of Convention Hall, he paused a moment to fill his lungs with fresh air. His eye rested on two boys as they sauntered into the alley, glancing over their shoulders to see if they were watched. His suspicions were confirmed. He had heard rumors that Wilkes and Anderson had been busy in the county reorganizing the Klan. He glanced up at the windows of the second story and saw that they had been covered from the inside with boards. He had located the "Den" of the local organization. With a smile he walked to his office and wrote a letter to Logan.

Anderson watched Craig turn into his office before he crossed the street to the old store. Without pausing he hurried through the alley and mounted the wooden stairs.

On the top platform a board wall hid the entrance from below. He slipped quickly behind this screen and rapped the new Klan signal on the door.

A small square panel slowly moved aside and a single eye glanced through the hole with sinister inquiry. Anderson gave another signal with his left hand touching his ear and the door quickly opened.

The place was crowded with more than a hundred roistering youngsters. Lowery was the leader of the noisiest group. His ugly face was red with whisky and he was passing the flask to his friends.

The room was fitted with rude equipment for a lodge. At the rear end of the long space, as far removed as possible from the boarded windows of the front, stood the low platform with a small table in front of the chair used by the presiding officer, the "Cyclops" of the "Den." On the right of the center of the room was a little reading stand for the use of the Secretary and on the left a similar stand and chair for the Treasurer. The weird names given these functionaries were for the confounding of the simple-minded. They took an oath kneeling on one side of the room and paid their fees on the other.

Wilkes was seated in the chair of the Cyclops trying in vain to get order. To the raps of his gavel not the slightest attention was paid by anybody. Anderson stood for a moment and watched the turmoil in dismay. He wondered why Wilkes had been fool enough to attempt to take his place. He was not the presiding officer of the local Den and the men knew it. Wilkes had supposed that his position of Supreme Command was known to the rank and file. They neither knew nor cared who might be the Grand Dragon of the state. They meant to run their local Klan to suit themselves. And they were doing it.

Wilkes rose and rapped angrily. The gang continued

to laugh, joke, catcall and play rough-house. Lowery drew his flask, held it aloft and cried:

"Here's to the new Klan—all white and no quitters!"

He took a drink and again passed the bottle. Anderson pushed through the crowd and reached the platform. Wilkes was furious. He pointed to Lowery and sternly said:

"Expel that tough. I'll go over to the hall, congratulate the Judge and be back in half an hour with orders—"

Anderson scowled.

"Do it yourself—"

Wilkes glanced at Lowery. He had his arms around two boys and his twisted face was lit with an ugly smile as he whispered his plans.

"Do the dirty work yourself," Anderson continued. "You got me into this thing—"

Wilkes drew himself up with dignity.

"It's your job. You're the Cyclops of the Den. I'm your superior officer. I order it. Throw him out, I tell you!"

Anderson made a helpless gesture.

"All right—"

Wilkes turned through the gang of whisky-smelling, smoking members. Anderson quietly passed among the crowd and tried to quiet them. It was useless as long as Lowery was the center of attraction. A large group of boys were completely under his control. They recognized only his authority and he ruled his gang with a rod of iron. One of the boys, on sight of Anderson's stern face, put his finger to his lips and whispered:

"Sh!"

Lowery promptly slapped his face and warned:

"Don't 'shush' me, sonny—"

Anderson confronted him.

"Lowery, you're expelled from the Klan—"

The tough glared at the Cyclops:

"Expelled?"

"Yes," was the prompt answer, "get out—"

Lowery pushed his bloated face into Anderson's.

"Expel me—like hell—you try it!"

The gang pressed close.

"Yes—try it—"

They breathed it in chorus. Anderson looked in vain for support. They backed the rowdy to a man.

"It's the order of the Chief," he said finally.

"All right," Lowery sneered, "let the Chief come and try it."

Anderson lifted his hands and walked away.

When Wilkes returned Lowery had taken charge of the meeting. He stood on the platform delivering a harangue to his followers. Wilkes received the report of the Cyclops at the door with an angry scowl. He looked at Lowery and moved toward the platform. The tough didn't wait. He came down to meet the Chief. They met in the middle of the room, Wilkes with only Anderson on one side, the gang close behind Lowery.

The two men confronted each other. The determined air with which Wilkes had started weakened. Lowery held his gaze defiantly. Wilkes quickly decided that discretion was the better part of valor. He broke the tension with a laugh. He put his hand on Lowery's shoulder.

"Cut out the drink, son—and you'll make a great Klan leader!"

The tough grinned and winked at his pals.

"Ain't half as drunk as you think I am—"

"Well, it's all right now," Wilkes went on in good-natured tones. "Come up here and listen. I've some big news for you."

The danger of an open clash passed. The gang were eager to hear. They listened attentively. Wilkes made no further effort at a formal opening of the Klan. He mounted the platform and began to speak in excited tones. His face was flushed by an excitement as ugly as Lowery's. For once the tough liked him. They cheered Wilkes' promises of power. Lowery led the second round of cheers. The cheering was in subdued tones that did not reach the street, but it was given with an undercurrent of tense excitement. Wilkes' final sentence swept them with enthusiasm.

"From to-day the new Klan runs this county. I am to be your next District Attorney and Anderson your Sheriff!"

When Wilkes passed out the door Lowery was giving his own orders to the gang in low excited tones.

CHAPTER XV

THE BLACK HOOD

WITHIN a month the reorganized Klan was in command politically of every county in the Independence judicial circuit. As a machine for controlling politics it was perfect. Each county was under the command of the shrewdest politician. Each township in each county was under the control of the most influential man who could be induced to join. The district was under the control of the strongest man within its limits, as the state was under the control of the most daring mind within the ranks.

The power wielded by the organization in politics was resistless, because its vote was thrown as a unit at the command of one man. It was not necessary to control a majority of the votes in the state. It was only necessary to control one half of the delegates to each nominating convention within one party.

Wilkes' triumph was quick. He defeated Craig for the nomination for District Attorney without a ballot on the floor of the convention. Craig withdrew in disgust.

The raids of the new organization did not begin until Wilkes had been nominated for District Attorney and Anderson for Sheriff.

Then the Klan began to function. Their first adventures were popular. They flogged a scalawag postmaster and ran him out of the county. A thing that had deeply disgusted the people of the South during the Reconstruction period was the class of postmasters appointed from

Washington. These men as a rule were the lowest scum of the earth.

Insolence and dishonesty were apparently the first qualification for a postmaster. Some of these men had manners that were insufferable. Their chief joy was to insult white men and women who were compelled to use the post office. A complaint from decent people to the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General was sure to bring an insulting reply and to place a new weapon of annoyance in the hands of the rascal who held the office. The revolution that overturned the Reconstruction Government in the state had not removed these cattle who still whelped and stabled behind the pigeonholes of the National mail service.

The new Klan in a single night swooped down on four of these brutes, flogged them and drove them out of the county. The people applauded. In two cases, the post offices were closed by the Department. Their patrons joyfully journeyed miles to the next office. In the other cases new appointments were made of a reputable kind.

These floggings had struck terror to the rank and file of the Radical party. The postmasters were the mainstay of their organization. The few carpetbaggers in the county didn't wait for a call from the raiders. They left for the North.

The first impressions of the new Klan were favorable. People who for years had suffered the insults of these rascals laughed and applauded. If that was the kind of work to which the Klan had set its hand, the people said "amen!"

Only the insiders knew that the new order was controlled by a set of dare-devils and unscrupulous politicians. Many of the men in the old organization thought that the announcement of dissolution was a ruse to deceive the

enemy. They refused to believe the Klan had been dissolved at all.

There was one man who made no mistake about the true import of these gallant deeds by masked raiders. Craig foresaw the next step before it was taken. He knew that it would be but a short time before the raiders would begin the work of personal revenge and criminal folly. He saw but one way to prevent it. He dreaded the undertaking, yet there was no help for it. He must again fight the devil with fire. The reign of terror inaugurated by a Black League had made necessary the original Ku Klux Klan. There must be a power to hold in check Wilkes' irresponsible gang.

Through Logan he organized a vigilance committee composed of the most reliable members of the old Klan who had refused to follow the new leader. He extended this vigilance committee into every county where the new Klan had begun operations.

These men he instructed to watch the movements of Wilkes' followers, learn in advance of their intended raids, break them up by moral suasion if possible; by force, as a last resort.

He found the task a tremendous one. For the first time he realized the meaning of the lawless power of the Klan. The secrecy of their movements under his leadership had been perfect. With his knowledge of the methods he believed it would be easy to defeat their plans. He found it next to impossible. In spite of the vigilance of his committees, the new Klan had inaugurated a reign of folly and terror unprecedented in the history of the Reconstruction saturnalia.

Exactly as Craig had figured the next raids were directed against negroes who had committed an imaginary offense against the white community. There were a few

negroes, urged by criminals from the North, who had become insolent. One of these young black bucks pushed a white boy off the sidewalk and jostled a white woman in a crowd.

The new Klan again bid for popular approval by whipping the negro and putting him on the train for the North with a rope around his neck. The act might have been applauded had they not called on two older negroes whose only offense was their prosperity. They had bought humble cabin homes in the black belt of the town. They were warned to move.

The warning made an unpleasant impression. The older negroes, badly frightened, consulted their white friends in town. The men whom they consulted were genuinely alarmed for what the future might hold in store. They told these negroes to arm themselves and stay. They did.

Two weeks later a gang of youngsters dressed themselves in disguises and decided to make good the threat of the Klan. Without orders or without consulting any one they surrounded old Abe Rogers' house and knocked for admission. He refused to open the door. The cabin was dark. No sound came from within save the frightened sobs of his children crouching on the floor against the back wall.

The young fool in command of the raid called his men up, ordered them to seize a log from the woodpile and smash the door down. He was promptly obeyed. The flimsy door fell from its hinges and the children screamed. The daring eighteen-year-old raider lighted a candle and boldly entered. He barely passed the threshold when an ax crashed into his skull. He fell mortally wounded and the man behind him was knocked senseless with a club wielded by an unseen hand from the darkness.

They gathered up the wounded and dead and hurried back to town. In vain they appealed for revenge. The black man who had defended his home had good advisers. He stood his ground and held his cabin. There were no tears wasted on the fools who had committed the outrage. Its tragic results had sent a shiver of horror through the county. On all sides men began to say, "What next?"

There was a lull for a few days and then the real work began which Craig had foreseen. The new masters of the county began to regulate the lives of individual men and women. In this work, too, their first raid was a bid for popular approval. They meted out justice to a man whose life was evil, yet who always kept inside the letter of the law. He was a coarse brute. His parents were English. He had been born in the United States, but his folks had taught him the laws of their race. And one of the principles of English law which he never forgot was that a man could whip his wife as much as he liked, provided he used a switch no larger than his finger.

He had become an expert in the selection and curing of the long slender hickory withes with which he whipped his miserable, spiritless wife. Night after night could be heard her pitiful cries. A neighbor had him arrested once but the terror-stricken woman refused to testify against him.

The new Klan called on Owens, took him out into the woods, stripped him to the waist and laid beside the tree all of the carefully cured hickory withes which they found in his house. The men deputized to flog him were named for the different clergymen in the county. When the fourth preacher was called up to give him the quota of lashes allotted to the Methodist Church, he rolled his eyes at his tormentors and moaned:

"My God, are you *all* preachers?"

The news of this thrashing and the exemplary life led by its victim afterwards did much to soften the sinister impression of the fatal raid on old Rogers.

And then events moved swiftly.

In one night they flogged ten negroes in various parts of the county. So far as any one could find out no offense of any kind had been committed by these men. Somebody wearing a white robe had a grudge against them, and they were flogged.

The night was made memorable by the appearance of the raiders in black hoods. The men on duty as executioners of Klan edicts had evidently been ordered to add this new touch of terror and mystery to their appearance.

With sinister regularity these raids were occurring every night. It was sometimes days before the victim dared crawl out of the woods and whisper in terror-stricken tones the story to a neighbor or a friend. It was always told with fearful urging not to make known that it had been breathed by the victim. They had all been warned that the penalty of death awaited this revelation. Many who had been brutally beaten hid their shame and suffering.

In one case a man was horribly mutilated. His only offense was that he had won the woman his enemy had desired. He had tried to hide the tragedy from his neighbors and would have succeeded had not the wound become infected and so inflamed he could not walk. A doctor was summoned and through his indignant wrath the story was spread. The sale of firearms reached unheard-of proportions within a week. Every hardware store was cleared of pistols and shotguns and the orders could not be filled.

A reign of terror held the people in an ugly spell.

Night after night a solitary, robed horseman could be seen standing on the same hill crest from which the sentinel of the old Klan had moved on the night of the parade. The appearance of the new black-hooded raider was in striking contrast to his predecessor. His figure slouched in the saddle. The black hood drooped from his head. The robe fitted his body badly and fell over the horse in ugly lines. The black hood, in particular, gave a sinister impression—the appearance of a headless horseman—until on nearer approach one caught through the holes the gleam of an eye in the moonlight.

In the woods below this hill crest the raiders were gathered. There were but ten of them and they wore black hoods. Their leader ordered five of them to execute his instructions for a raid in the lower township, ten miles distant. His orderly headed the group, blew his whistle and they dashed away in the shadows. Somewhere in the darkness sat their victim unconscious of the doom decreed. He had been tried without notice in a court without witnesses. His accuser was his personal enemy. He had not been heard.

The aggressive leader to-night had something of importance near by. He held his five men until the moon sank lower. He told them his destination and ordered them to mount. A boy hesitated and asked him to repeat his order.

"Surely you don't mean that?" he asked indignantly.

"Sure."

"Raid an eighteen-year-old girl at home with a foolish, helpless mother?"

"That's what I said," snapped the leader.

"Not for me," protested the youth.

"No?"

"No."

The leader's fist suddenly smashed against the boy's head and knocked him down. He lay for a moment unconscious, the brute towering over him. When he slowly staggered to his feet, the big one stepped close.

"You know me and you know my business to-night. You're going with me—or I'm going to send you to hell right now—which is it goin' to be?"

The leader cocked his revolver. The boy looked in vain for help from the four silent black hoods circled about him.

"I'll go," he said thickly.

The five men mounted first, the leader blew his whistle and led them into the darkness. The moon had just dipped behind the hills. They rode in a swift gallop down the hill, along the winding road through the valley and up the last range of hills outside of Independence.

On the edge of town they halted. A single horseman rode forward and reconnoitered. He returned in five minutes. The leader lifted his hand and the six white horses, two abreast, rode forward. The echoes of hoofbeats startled the people from their sleep, but the riders passed so swiftly that they were gone before a sleeper had time to rush to a window and see them pass. It was half-past eleven and but few were on the streets.

The raiders passed but one man before reaching their objective. He was a negro who took to his heels. They reined their horses before a shabby little house set far back from the sidewalk behind a clump of China trees. The foliage was still green and almost hid the house.

The leader sprang from his horse. The five men dismounted promptly. One man led the horses to the gate and held their reins, ready for instant retreat if they should be attacked in force. Five black-hooded figures softly approached the house. One circled it and took his

stand at the back door. Three of them took up positions at the front and the commander knocked.

A woman's voice inside cried:

"Who's that?"

"A friend to see you," was the prompt answer, breathed through the black hood.

"You can't come in. We've gone to bed—"

"Get out of bed," was the stern command, "and be damn quick about it."

There was a stir within and two voices could now be heard in the darkness. A girl was pleading with her mother.

"Don't open the door, Ma, please—they've come for me—"

"Come fer you—whose come fer you?—what do you mean?"

The shivering figure crouched against the wall afraid to speak the dreaded word.

The mother shook her.

"Who's come fer you?"

A loud knock on the door rang through the room.

"The Klan—it's the Ku Klux Klan—"

The older woman walked to the window muttering as she walked.

"You're crazy. The Ku Klux Klan are not going to hurt us—a widow and a helpless girl—"

She drew the curtains and peered through the darkness. The shadows of the porch were too deep to make out the figures but she heard a voice give the order:

"Smash it in!"

Two heavy forms lurched against the door, the fastenings broke and it flew open. The foremost stepped inside, struck a match and held it high over his head. The

women stood staring in terror. The girl backed trembling into a corner.

"Light the lamp," the black hood ordered.

The woman obeyed in silence.

The eyes from the hood searched the room and rested on the shivering figure in the corner.

"Come on, honey girl, shed your nightie and slip into a dress. We've got ter be a-goin'."

The mother faced the shrouded figure.

"You get out of here, while she's a-dressin'."

The answer was a blow that hurled the woman across the table and brought the girl to her side with a scream.

"Be still, Ma—they'll kill ye."

The mother dropped into a chair trembling with abject fear.

"Will you go outside just a minute while I put on my clothes?" the girl pleaded.

"I will not—" was the surly answer. "Put on your duds. I'll not be the first man who's seen you do it."

The girl hurried to obey. The woman lifted her head again.

"Fer God's sake, ain't ye got no respect fer a mother's feelin'—won't ye go outside?"

"Shut up!"

The eyes of the black hood deliberately watched the young figure dress. She came down to her mother and clung to her hand. The woman suddenly sprang to her feet and seized the shrouded form.

"Oh, please, for the love of God, don't hurt my little girl. She ain't nothing but a baby. 'Twant more'n yesterday since she wuz in my arms an' I was croonin' to her an' rockin' her to sleep. You got on a white sheet an' black hood but, oh, my God, you must be human.

I hear you talk. You're a man, ain't yer? How kin ye do such a thing to a helpless girl—"

The black hood was silent until the limp form collapsed on the floor.

"Don't, Ma," the daughter pleaded. "Don't take on so. It won't do any good—"

"You bet it won't," the hooded figure snapped. "Come on—"

He seized the girl's hand and started to the door. With sudden energy she tore herself from his grasp, backed again into a corner, seized a big conch shell from the rickety what-not and hurled it at her assailant's head. He dodged in time and plunged after her. He caught her slight figure in his arms and held her helpless. She screamed. He put his hand over her mouth. With sudden fierce strength she tore the black hood from his face.

The mother was on her feet now staring at the ugly intruder in rage and horror.

"Berry Lowery, you dirty dog!" she panted. "I'll get even with you for this. I told ye to keep away from my girl and this is how you get back at me—"

The ugly face laughed and the cruel hands twisted the slender wrists.

"Turned me down fer the putty boy—did ye? Well, I'm goin' to have a little chat with you to-night and then send you out o' the county. Yer putty boy kin foller ye. We don't need ye in this town—"

The girl had ceased to struggle and began to sob. Lowery dragged her to her mother and said in threatening tones:

"You've seen my face to-night, old woman. It's a pity. If you give my name to a livin' soul—I'll kill you the next night—so long—"

He dragged his victim to the door. She seized the frame and looked back at her mother whose head had sunk in a fit of hopeless tears. She gripped the tough's arm and pleaded:

"Don't send me away—for God's sake. I've never been away from home. I don't know anybody but my mother—I'll die—I'll die—"

Lowery made no reply. He slipped the black hood over his head, dragged the girl through the door, threw her across his saddle and mounted behind her. The hooded figures followed, and galloped swiftly out of town.

CHAPTER XVI

A WARNING

LOWERY'S exploit was the sensation of the hour by noon the next day. The terror-stricken mother had not revealed the name of her assailant, but her screams had been heard and the neighbors saw six black-hooded horsemen mount and gallop away.

And her daughter had been kidnaped. The fact could not be concealed. She was frantic with grief and told at last the details of the ugly event. A wave of indignation swept the county. A few decent men in the new order began an investigation. Anderson furiously denied any knowledge of the raid. Wilkes aided in the search. Not a trace of the leader could be found. Both Wilkes and Anderson had a pretty clear idea on the subject. But they ventured no opinions. Both of them were afraid of Lowery.

The two incidents, the fatal raid on old Rogers and the kidnaping of an eighteen-year-old girl from a lighted street of the town, produced a state of terror and uncertainty that bordered on anarchy. Neighbor began to look at neighbor with ugly suspicion. What sort of deviltry would break out next, and on whom, could not be guessed. Men who had spent their lives in the town felt the foundations of society sinking beneath their feet. Every man who knew the use of a gun got one and kept it loaded.

Yet a single loaded gun was a feeble instrument with which to face a horde of armed horsemen disguised by

black hoods and moving under the cover of darkness. They struck without warning. It was impossible to prepare an adequate defense. A single gun might kill or wound one—but they got the man they were after. They spared neither man nor woman. They used tar and feathers, the knotted lash, the knife, the revolver with equal recklessness—when they pleased and on whom they pleased. And no one could identify them.

The black hood was their symbol. Even Wilkes was not quite sure of his own safety. Certainly, he had no intention of attacking Lowery. The tough's influence among the rank and file of the local Den had steadily increased since his first triumph over discipline.

The morning after the kidnaping, Craig walked into Wilkes' law office, brushed by his clerks and entered the inner room where his enemy was at work.

Wilkes sprang to his feet, his hand on the revolver in his hip pocket.

"You needn't be alarmed; I'm not ready for you yet," said Craig, his eyes holding Wilkes' with a steady light.

"Well, I'm ready for you," was the quick retort. "What do you want?"

"Merely to give you a little advice this morning."

"When I need your advice, I'll let you know."

Craig closed the door.

"Your men are covering the name of the Ku Klux Klan with infamy," Craig went on evenly. "If you have even the rudiments of common sense you must know that within a few weeks these fools will be beyond control—"

"I haven't felt the need of your help as yet," interrupted Wilkes.

"No, but I'm generous. I volunteer to anticipate the needs of your weak mind—"

"John Craig," Wilkes broke in angrily, "if you have

anything really to say to me, say it, and get out—"

"I will say it, my boy, and—don't—you—forget it!" Craig answered with quiet emphasis. "I'm on the track of the men who are terrorizing this county. I'll come up with them some night and there'll be business for the coroner next day. Permit another outrage and I'll find your men if I drag the bottom of hell for them, and when I do, I'll hang them in front of your house. If I fail to find them I'll—hold—you—personally—responsible!"

Before Wilkes could reply he turned on his heel, slammed the door and left.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FUNMAKERS

CRAIG'S warning was the last straw that broke the spirit of the new Klan Commander. From the beginning of the unauthorized raids, Wilkes realized that he had set in motion forces beyond his control. And he knew that Craig would make good his threat. But the thought of his counter stroke was not so disturbing as the fear of what the young devils might do to provoke it.

The election was drawing near. A monstrous outrage committed by men in Klan disguise, just before the election, might start a landslide in the wrong direction. He called Anderson and directed him as the officer in command of the county to ride to every local Den and issue orders that all raids cease until after the election. If deemed necessary he should demand the surrender of robes and hoods.

Anderson laughed.

"It only costs two dollars to get a new rig—why call in the ones they have?"

Wilkes scratched his head.

"That's right. Anyhow, you can't make the orders too strong to stop all activities until this election is over—"

He paused and mopped his brow. It was plain that he was panic-stricken. Anderson watched him in silence, smiled and said:

"Don't lose your nerve. We'll pull through all right if we're firm with these rowdies. You'd have had no

trouble if you'd knocked Lowery down the first time he defied you—"

"Yes, yes, I see that now," Wilkes admitted, "but what's done can't be undone—and we've got to stop these fools—"

He paused and a haunted look crept into his eyes.

"My God!" he went on moodily. "I never realized before that there's a devil in every human skin that'll break loose if you give it a chance in the dark. If you only knew the crazy demands that have been made on me to send men out on raids."

"You don't have to tell it. They've asked me, too. We're in a close place, Wilkes. We've got to keep our nerve—"

"All right—we will," the lawyer interrupted. "Get on your horse and go to every Den in the county. I'm going to three other counties where the devil has broken loose and stop it if I can."

Wilkes seized a bag and hurried to the train.

His county Chief started on his round of inspection. In firm tones he read the riot act to the leader of every township. The discouraging thing about it was that no officer knew anything of the origin of the raids. Each one swore that no man in his Den was guilty.

The effect of Anderson's warning, however, was good. The hooded raiders stopped operations and Klan activity entered a new phase. The lash, the knife, the revolver, the tar and feathers were laid aside for the moment for terrorizing pranks on negroes. There was method still in the choice of the new victims. They raided negroes whom they wished to terrorize for some reason. In many cases the reason was personal. A negro had been insolent to a member. He received a call and was duly warned.

Occasionally the raid was made with a sense of com-

munity value. Since his doubtful triumph in the convention, Julius had become a man of vast importance—in his own estimation. He felt called of the Lord to utter prophetic warnings of coming judgment days that would follow the Klan's revival. He got in the habit of standing on the street corners and going into a pretended trance. In mumbled monotone he would warn an imaginary audience to flee the wrath of God, repent and be baptized before it would be forever too late.

In spite of Anderson's warning, the younger set inside the Klan decided to rid the town of this nuisance. Their plans were laid in profound secrecy and executed suddenly without warning.

On the night they planned the raid on the Apostle of Sanctification, Blackmar had returned to town and spent the day in conference with Julius. At ten o'clock Henry discovered that the Apostle had waited until Laura finished the dishes and had taken Blackmar into the kitchen for a long session. He listened at the door for half an hour and heard them deep in the discussion of political plans. He saw his chance, repaired to the cottage at the gate and softly knocked. The light was out and his former wife had gone to bed. He knocked again. She lifted her head and called:

"Who de debbil's dat?"

"Hit's me—Henry."

She rose grumbling, opened the door about a foot, thrust her face into the opening and said:

"What yer comin' to my house dis time er night fur, nigger?"

"Ah, Laura, honey," Henry pleaded, "ain't I yer first love—yer ole man dat yer live wid fer ten year before dat slue-footed hypercrite come between us—"

Laura grunted.

"He didn't come between us. He climbed on top o' you an' mauled de life outen you—what could I do?"

Henry's voice dropped to whispered pleading.

"Ah, come on now, gal, Julius still talkin' to ole Blackmar in de Jedge's kitchen. He be dar all night. Lemme come in des a minute an' talk over ole times—"

Suddenly out of the shadows a dozen white horsemen swung an ominous circle around the house. Henry was so intent in his pleading that they were on him before he knew it. Laura had slammed the door in his face before he fixed his terror-stricken eyes on the ghostly figures.

Glancing over his shoulder he tried in vain to smash the door open with his shoulder. It had been bolted and barred.

"Hi dar, Laura," he whispered. "Fer de love o' de Lawd lemme in—lemme in!"

There was no movement inside and Henry turned once more and tried to take in the full meaning of the Terror that loomed about him. A white horseman had ridden up to the door and stood towering over him. The figure struck a match and thrust it into Henry's face. His eyes fairly popped as he saw the steady gleam of two living lights from the holes in the hood. They seemed to bore through his soul and lay bare its innermost secrets.

"I ain't done er thing—gemmens," he stammered. "I wuz des knockin' at de do' ter pass de time er night when yer come. I swar I ain't done nary thing. Fore God hit's so—"

"Come here," the leader ordered.

Henry came, trembling and glancing in all directions to find a way out. The circle was closed. The voice of the leader spoke.

"We're not after you, Henry."

The negro tried to mutter his thanks but his tongue

wouldn't work. He merely walled his eyes upward and gasped.

"Then—fare—thee—well—"

He started to run. An iron hand gripped his throat and swung him back. Two men had dismounted and were acting as orderlies.

"Where's old Julius?" the leader asked.

Henry answered with joy.

"Right up dar in de Jedge's kitchen—I hopes ye git him—"

An orderly whispered to the leader.

"Shall we raid the Judge's house?"

The commander shook his head.

"No. Finish your work here."

A white figure slowly approached Henry and extended a skeleton hand saying:

"Good-by, Henry!"

The negro gazed in an agony of uncertainty and terror. There it was—a skeleton hand! The bones rattled. He could hear them. The chalk-boned fingers seemed to glow in the starlight. A voice somewhere in space said:

"Shake!"

Henry tried to obey but his hand wouldn't rise from his side. It hung limp. His breath came in gasps. The skeleton fingers at last closed on his. He shut his eyes, shook the bones and asked God to save him. He got his hand loose from the skeleton and looked in vain for a way out. On all sides he was circled with death.

A rider dashed in close and sprang from his horse, took off his head and handed it to the negro. Before he could yell or move the thing was pressed into his hands. He couldn't see the face. It was covered by the hood. But he could feel the blood trickling through his own fingers from the gash that had severed the head from

the body. He looked up and saw the headless figure beside him. The red flesh of the stump of the neck where the head once stood!

He found his voice at last. It breathed a prayer from the deep places of his soul.

"Lord Jesus, save me,—save me *now!*"

With a leap he dropped the head, and broke the circle of white figures. He ran down the deserted street as he never ran before. He ran in leaps and as he turned the corner smashed into Julius who was returning from a walk with Blackmar.

Henry glanced back over his shoulder and Julius sternly demanded:

"Whare ye gwine, nigger?"

Henry shivered.

"I ain't gwine nowhar—I'se a comin' away frum somefin—"

His voice had died to a whisper before he finished his answer. And he was on his way.

Julius watched his frantic flight with a pious smile. "De sneakin' coward—he might a-knowed I'd ketch 'im!" He was still laughing when he heard the hoofbeat of the Klan almost on him. He dropped flat in the ditch until they passed and crawled home on his hands and knees.

On his return to Independence next day, Wilkes learned of the escapade with a sickening sense of defeat. Nothing could stop them. It was a prank, of course, but it was a test of authority. They had defied his orders and he faced the future with dread.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER WARNING

THE next move of the Klan rapidly developed. The rough-necks had been more or less impressed with the stern orders from headquarters. But the moment they heard of the pranks on the negroes, they laughed. If the Klan disguise could be used for such cheap work as that, real men could go on using it for big ends.

And they lost no time in getting at it. For two nights their pickets roamed the county, testing a rumor that an organization of vigilantes had been developed to fight them in the field. They found no trace of such an organization.

On the third night just before dawn a squadron of black hoods rode quietly through town and stopped in front of Klein's cottage. The dog inside the house barked and they remained motionless until he was quiet. A shrouded figure slipped from the saddle and approached the door. He placed a torn piece of paper on the panel and pressed a tack into it.

The dog barked again. He waited a moment, walked back to his horse, and the squadron moved slowly out of town and back to their rendezvous in the forest of Inwood.

Klein heard the dog bark the second time and caught the stealthy footfall on the walkway as the intruder returned to his companions. Wide-eyed he lay awake until the sun rose and flooded the room with the crisp light of autumn.

The thing was ominous. He had been vaguely expect-

ing this call since the new activities of the Klan had begun. If these marauders dared to kidnap a helpless native girl while her mother looked on in anguish, why should the ruffians spare a Jew of foreign birth? He had enemies —men he had beaten, fairly, in the game of commerce. They wouldn't miss this chance to strike. He had wondered why they delayed.

He brooded over what it meant. He guessed it correctly. He felt the dirty fingers on his door panel fumbling the tack as if they had pressed it into his own breast.

While his wife was busy in the kitchen with breakfast, he cautiously opened the door, closed it, removed the piece of paper and read the crude scrawl:

"No Jews is wanted in this town— Git—or you may see the—

"K.K.K."

He stared for a moment, hastily crumpled the paper and put it in his pocket. He would say nothing to his wife and boy. It would only distress them. They could not help.

He ate his breakfast with a forced gayety and hurried downtown. He went straight to Craig's office, heard voices inside and hesitated to enter. A caller had just gone in before him and left the door ajar. He could distinctly hear the conversation.

"What the devil, Ben, are you in town this early for?" Craig asked in surprise.

"Nuthin' much," Logan answered. "Couldn't sleep last three nights. Tuck a notion to come down here and sleep on that old sofy there for a while ef you don't mind?"

"You think it's as bad as that?"

"I know damn well it is—"

"What do you know?"

"I got a hunch."

Without further words the countryman took off his hat, sat down and made himself at home.

Klein timidly rapped and Craig called cheerfully:

"Come in."

The Jew entered. He was trembling in spite of his effort at self-control. His fine eyes had in them the look of a hunted animal. At sight of him Logan slowly rose, looked at Craig and said:

"What did I tell ye!"

Craig placed a chair.

"Sit down, Nathan," he said cordially. "I'm glad to see you."

The visitor seated himself in a sort of daze, as if his mind were far away. He started to speak and failed.

Craig put his hand on his shoulder.

"My good friend, what is it? You can say anything to Logan that you could say to me—"

Klein nodded.

"Yes, I know. He is your faithful friend—" He paused, drew the scrap of paper from his pocket and handed it to Craig. The lawyer read the note aloud to Logan and the two exchanged glances. The exchange was not lost on their caller. He shivered and rubbed his hands.

Craig smiled.

"I don't think this should worry you, Nathan. A lot of fool boys have set out to play pranks in Klan disguises. It must be one of their clumsy jokes—"

Klein shook his head.

"No, my friend—they mean it. I got that kind of warning in Poland once. I lived in London for ten years when I was a boy and learned to write and speak your

language. No boy wrote that scrawl. It is the work of an illiterate brute. Every twist of the pen is instinct with a coward's cruelty. Besides, I have the gift of knowing things in the dark. Before I saw that notice on my door I felt the ugly hand pressing the nail into the panel. I felt the presence of his shrouded companions waiting outside—"

"How many were there?" Craig interrupted.

"I do not know. From the sound of the horses' hoofs I should say eight or ten—"

"So many?"

"Yes."

Craig looked at his caller with a new sense of his appealing personality. There was an infinite sadness in his tones, a far-away look in his luminous eyes—in their somber deeps the pity and the pathos of a thousand years of martyrdom. Again he was struck with his resemblance to Hoffmann's Christ.

He turned toward his desk and picked up a worn copy of the Constitution of the Republic. He looked at its gilt-lettered title, opened the volume and turned toward Klein.

"I want to tell you something, my friend. Here is the greatest charter of human rights ever penned—"

He touched the book reverently.

"When our fathers made this Constitution they wrote it in tears, with hands scarred by the martyr fires of centuries. They knew, these fathers of ours who gathered at Philadelphia in 1787, the history of man's bitter struggle for civil and religious liberty. They knew the sad story of the bloody religious wars that had cursed humanity. They knew that Catholic and Protestant were both guilty of these crimes. They also knew that both Catholic and Protestant had signed the Declaration of Inde-

pendence and side by side had fought the battles of the Revolution. Picture the scene—

"They are seated now at their council table writing and discussing the principles on which to build our Republic. A proposal is made to establish a State Church.

"Jefferson is first to speak his impetuous message:

" 'I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man—'

"Madison, who presides, is slower and more careful but none the less forceful in his opposition:

" 'Religion can be directed only by reason or conviction and not by force or violence. Religion, then, must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man, to exercise it as these may indicate. This is an inalienable right.'

"The religious bigot is joined by another who makes a fiery address and demands the exclusion of the Jew from the rights of American citizenship.

"Madison shakes his head:

" 'We are all refugees from religious or political persecution. I propose this article—'

"He hands a slip of paper to the Clerk who reads:

" '*Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*'

"As the Clerk finishes the reading the council burst into cheers. Madison puts the vote and it is unanimously carried."

Craig bent close to his friend.

"This is free America, Nathan—"

Klein sadly shook his head.

"I am a Jew and I have my business rivals. God has given me a genius for commerce. I make my customers my friends. I ransack the earth to bring to them its

beauty and its joy. I succeed and I am hated— I face the facts."

He paused and rose. Craig slipped his arm about him.

"Remember this, Nathan. You are an American citizen. If you are not safe, I am not safe. Freedom is a mockery. We have no republic—"

A faint smile overspread the thoughtful face.

"Perhaps it is so. I must believe and wait. I thank you, my friend. You have cheered me—"

Logan stepped near and said in his quaint drawl:

"Lat me cheer ye a little more. All the boss has said goes with me. But my faith ain't as strong as his. I believe in trustin' God always—but 'specially in keepin' my powder dry. Him and me'll stand guard at your house for a spell. He ain't said so, but he will—"

Craig nodded. Nathan smiled again, pressed both hands and went to his business.

Logan looked into Craig's troubled face and said:

"I told ye I had a hunch—"

CHAPTER XIX

THE RAID

FOR a week Craig or Logan stood guard in front of old Nathan's cottage. The lawyer watched until one o'clock and Logan from one until sunrise. Each carried two revolvers and a blackjack. At sunrise the countryman ate his breakfast and went to bed in the rear room while Craig took his place at his desk in the office. Six men were armed and held in readiness to answer their call at a moment's notice.

There was no machinery of law that could be summoned to their aid. The one man in power who had the will to fight the Klan was the man on whom Craig could not call. And the Judge was holding court in a distant mountain county. Had he been in Independence, his loud talk could not have helped. It might have provoked greater activity on the part of the irresponsible marauders.

On the eighth night of the watch, Klein insisted that the danger had passed. He asked Craig to trouble himself no more with such tiresome work.

"I am grateful, my good friend," he said, "but it is enough. You have guarded my home and my loved ones for a whole week. No attack has been made. It may have been a boys' prank after all. You must go now."

"You feel perfectly safe?" Craig asked.

"Perfectly—" was the assuring answer.

"All right. You must have keen eyes and ears, and report to me the slightest sign of an attack—"

Nathan nodded.

"I will." He seized the lawyer's hand. "And may the God of our fathers keep you and bless my generous friend—"

Craig pressed the extended hand in silence and walked slowly back to his rooms. He had not seen a slouching figure standing in the shadows of the alley across the way.

Two nights later at the same rendezvous in the forest of Inwood, a group of seven men quietly robed their horses and adjusted black hoods on their own heads. Again there were inquiries as to the character of the coming raid. The leader boldly proclaimed it, squared himself and announced:

"If there's a cur among you with a white liver let him whine and I'll give him some medicine now—"

The shrouded figures stood motionless. Not a word of protest was ventured.

"Good!" their commander cried. "Come on."

They leaped into their saddles, the spurs dug into their horses' sides and the raid began. It was the most daring thing yet undertaken. Their victim lived on one of the principal streets of the town. And he had powerful friends. His house had been guarded by armed watchmen. They would show his friends to-night that they wielded a power no man could resist. They would make their deed a proclamation of supremacy.

It was barely nine o'clock and Craig had grown tired of Logan's lank figure loafing around the office. He was begging him to go home.

"For the hundredth time I ask you, Will, to go home and let me rest in peace?"

Logan scratched his shaggy, uncombed head:

"No, I'll stick around a little longer. I still got that hunch."

He deliberately put his revolvers on the desk, took off

his coat and lay down on the couch. Since the watch had ceased he refused to use Craig's bed. He went to sleep and the lawyer took up the work on his desk.

The moon was shining in the full splendor of a still warm autumn night. The weather had been so fine, the birds had nested twice and raised two broods of young. From every lawn in the wide shaded streets of the town could be heard the liquid notes of their night songs of love.

In the light of the full moon, children were playing on the sidewalks and in the middle of the streets. Boys hung over the gates talking with their sweethearts, while the fathers and mothers sat inside reading or talking.

The thunder of the raiders' hoofbeats on the hill outside of town rang clearly. Here and there a head was lifted at the sound. But in a moment it died away in the ravine this side the hill and no notice was taken of it.

Five minutes later the squadron of shrouded horses and black-hooded men rode into the heart of the town. They rode as cavalrymen plunge into the ranks of their foe—a savage charge with drawn revolvers gripped in the right hand of each rider. In the ring of horses' hoofs against the hard ground there was the challenge of war. Their revolvers could clearly be seen in the bright light of the moon, as they plunged forward to their task.

Children dashed from the streets in terror, ran into their homes and slammed the doors. The lights went out instantly. In the darkness nervous hands gripped guns or revolvers. On every side could be heard the slamming of gates, the click of bolts, and then darkness and silence —save for the sobbing of a frightened child.

As the raiders plunged toward the corner two blocks from Klein's door, Sammy and his dog was playing with a lot of the children in the middle of the street. The

children heard the roar of the coming squadron before their white robes flashed in sight. With a single impulse of terror, they broke and ran.

The dog bristled, barked, stopped and faced the enemy. Sammy called in vain. He grabbed the bristling form in his arms and limped toward his house.

As the swirling horsemen swung the corner he was fumbling the latch of the gate. He got it open at last and fell inside. Two men on foot were passing at the moment. When they saw the white forms of the leaping horses, they turned and ran. In such a crisis it was every man for himself. They would have denied this if cross-examined. They would have sworn that they ran to protect their homes. As a matter of fact they ran because they were scared.

The sudden attack of these disguised, armed horsemen never failed to spread terror. Such an attack, swift, unforeseen, savage, irresponsible, was an awe-inspiring mystery. No man knew against whom the raiders were galloping. No man could know their purpose. No man could guess with what devilish brutality that purpose might be executed. Even in war, with trained soldiers under trained officers, a night attack is a thing of horror. A night attack by masked and armed brutes or fools, on helpless men and women, without warning and without organized forces of resistance, could only be a thing of stifling, sickening terror. The human mind could not resist it. Two such raids were sufficient to reduce any community to a condition of maudlin fear. This was the second in Independence.

Klein and his wife were seated at a table. The lamp lighted his kindly face with a mellow radiance that brought out in sharp relief its fine lines. The mother was knitting

a sweater for the boy. The father's keen ear caught the roar of the storm before it broke around the corner.

He sprang to his feet, pale and trembling. He knew its meaning. The mother also knew. She heard the boy's feet touch the step. Klein started to open the door. She caught and held him back. Sammy stumbled and fell on the steps still holding his dog. He looked over his shoulder and saw the white figures dismounting in front of the gate. The leader was giving orders in sharp tones. The boy leaped to the door and fumbled the knob. The dog was growling and trying desperately to get loose. He held him with the last ounce of his strength.

At last his mother opened the door and dragged him inside.

"It's the Klan—mamma," he gasped. "And they're coming here—"

"Yes, I know," she answered dumbly.

The boy turned out the lamp, and seized his father's hand. The mother caught his arm. They were not seeking his protection. They both knew instinctively that the blow was aimed at him.

"You must hide, Nathan—" she gasped.

"No," was the firm answer.

"You must, father," the boy pleaded.

Against his protest they dragged him into a closet and pushed a bureau in front of the door. They stood still in the dark and listened.

The leader was placing his pickets. He stationed one at the gate, and sent one around the house to the back door. The watchers inside heard him walk by the window and take his stand beside the little porch.

Sammy slipped to the front and peeped out. He saw four white figures in black hoods creep through the rosebushes toward the house. One passed to the right and

one to the left, looked carefully around the house and met the leader and his companions at the steps. They huddled there for a moment in whispered talk. The one in command stationed three companions on the porch in the shadows of the rose trellis.

The rays of the moon fell full on his white robe and black hood as he stood on the steps giving orders. The hood slouched backward from his forehead and the two eye holes seemed to have been dug out of his skull. The boy shivered at the hideous mask and whispered to his mother:

"We mustn't let 'em in!"

"They're comin' in," was the hopeless answer.

The boy pushed the table against the door and set the bolt fiercely.

The mother shook her head.

"They can smash a window, son."

A heavy fist pounded on the door. The mother's heart stood still. Her lips refused to move. The boy crept back to the window and saw the black hood listening at the keyhole.

"Open this door!" came the stern command.

Again the heavy fist smashed against its panel.

The woman inside moved the table. The boy caught her hand and held it.

"No—no—don't open it—" he pleaded.

She ordered Sammy to go into the kitchen and keep still. He refused at first and then obeyed. The dog followed at his heels.

The hooded figure lurched against the door. The mother quickly removed the table, drew the bolt and opened the door.

Four black hoods pressed into the room.

"Light that lamp," the foremost figure ordered.

The trembling fingers of the woman obeyed. She stood behind the lamp, pale and dry-eyed, watching the hideous things close in on her.

"Where is he?" demanded the commander.

"He's not here," she faltered.

"You're a damned liar. Where is he?"

The parched lips refused to move. The shrouded figure sprang at her, seized her wrist and twisted it until a smothered cry of pain came at last.

"Bring him out," he growled, "or I'll wring your neck." She did not answer and the brute again twisted her arm until she sank to the floor in agony. As the room grew dim she saw only the cruel eyes gleaming from the black hood bending over her.

"I'll find him or kill you. Take your choice." He loosed the wrist and turned to his companions.

"Search the place. He's here."

While they ransacked the house for its master, there was a stir in Craig's law office. Henry, on his way home, had heard the roar of horses' hoofs, followed their course and saw them stop in front of old Nathan's cottage. He ran to the office and told his master. He was not only carrying information, he was saving his own life. He wanted protection. And he knew the best place to find it.

He had reported the exact number of the raiders seen. He counted seven horses. They were all hitched to the rack in front of the store next to the house.

"We won't call for any help," Craig said as he placed two revolvers and a blackjack in his pockets.

"No," Logan answered. "We can handle that gang."

Craig handed him a blackjack.

"Use that first. Don't shoot if you can help it—"

Logan nodded.

"I understand. But I'm takin' a coil o' rope and some strips o' cloth."

The lawyer fixed him with a stern look.

"Which you will not use without orders—"

The countryman smiled.

"Sure, I won't."

The shrouded figures had searched the house and failed to find their prey. The leader reserved the kitchen for a personal call. He had heard a faint sound from that quarter and suspected that Klein had hidden there.

Carrying a lighted candle, he pushed the kitchen door open and entered. The dog sprang forward with a growl, covering the boy.

Sammy heard the click of the revolver's hammer as the ugly finger cocked it. With a cry of anguish he leaped before the dog and lifted his hands in pleading:

"Please don't shoot him—he can't hurt you—he's just a pet dog—"

The boy watched the cold eyes shining through the black hood along the barrel of the revolver and saw the big fist tighten. There was a flash of flame and smoke, a dull roar in his ears, and the dog lay quivering at his feet.

He covered his face in his hands and sank with a groan to the floor. He stared for a moment at his dying friend, drew the limp body into his lap, and slipped his arms about it. A tremor passed through the furry bundle, it relaxed and the boy's head sank low.

"Good-by, doggie," he whispered softly and burst into sobs.

Craig and Logan did not hear the shot in the kitchen. They had just turned the corner into the street two blocks away. Logan carefully reconnoitered the place and confirmed Henry's estimate of the number of the attacking party. There were just seven horses hitched to the rack.

There was no sentinel guarding the horses. So sure were the raiders that the terror which they inspired would give them protection they had deemed such precaution foolish.

A single picket stood at the gate. Craig knew, of course, that they had stationed one at the back door. The rose garden was hedged on either side by the walls of the stores. The only way of escape was from the front or rear.

The sentinel at the front gate stood just inside of the picket fence beside a rosebush. His back was turned to the two advancing men. Logan gripped his revolver. Craig put his hand on his arm.

"Not a sound. Use your blackjack. It's easy."

Logan waved the lawyer into the background and slipped softly along the picket fence. His footfall was unheard. The grass was yet a green noiseless carpet. The black-hooded sentinel had placed his revolver inside his robe and stood with folded arms listening to the song of a mocking bird in the magnolia across the way.

Craig watched the drama with a sense of poignant shame that the Southland had come at last to this—neighbor creeping on neighbor in the stillness of a glorious moonlit night. Inside, the sanctity of a home violated by half-drunken brutes. The whole structure of human society reduced to the level of the beast who stalks his prey in the darkness.

And such a southern night! The warm breath of the deep Indian summer laden with the perfume of a thousand roses filled his lungs. The song of the mocking bird across the street lent to the scene an accompaniment of farce and completed the sense of the collapse of civilization.

There was no help for it now. He had been cast to play a leading rôle in this tragic farce and he must see it through. As Logan crept closer on the picket, his own

hand gripped a revolver. He saw the countryman's tall figure slowly rise and his blackjack whistled downward.

The shrouded figure fell in a heap. It was the work of a minute to rip off his disguise. Logan quickly donned the robe and hood and slipped around the house to greet the sentinel at the back door. It would be a pleasure only, now that he wore their own regalia. The risk was nothing.

Craig quickly tied and gagged the fallen picket and cautiously followed Logan. The rear guard was off duty for the moment. They waited until he reappeared and took his stand beside the little porch.

Craig crouched into the shadows of the shrubbery while Logan approached the unsuspecting raider. The sentinel merely glanced over his shoulder and saw a fellow raider approaching. He supposed it to be the man from the front gate.

"Greetings, brother!" Logan called at close range.

"Hello, yourself!" he answered carelessly, as the shrouded one drew closer. "I wish they'd hurry up—"

"I'll hurry 'em—" was the quick answer, as the blackjack crashed on the hood. The figure crumpled. In another minute he was bound and gagged and Craig wore his outfit.

"It's a beautiful job, Chief," Logan chuckled. They listened at the back door and heard the loud voices in the living-room. Craig placed Logan at the rear door.

"Take your stand close beside the entrance. I'll call them out, one at a time. As they pass through the door give them greetings—"

"Without words," the countryman added.

Craig nodded and boldly entered the rear door. It had been opened early in the ransacking of the house. He entered the living-room and stood in his disguise for a

moment unnoticed. The mother crouched in a chair. The boy had brought his dead friend in, and sat on the floor holding the body in dumb misery. The men were reporting the futile search. They had gone through the cottage, the chicken house and the stable in the rear and found nothing.

Craig beckoned to one of the raiders. He looked up in surprise at the sentinel's call, but answered immediately.

Craig led the way out through the rear door.

He whispered to Logan:

"He's coming—" and passed out into the yard.

The Klansman paid no attention to the stiff, silent figure standing guard at the rear door. As he passed, the stiff figure suddenly moved, a blackjack whistled and in a minute another bound and gagged man lay on the ground.

When Craig returned, the leader had begun to cross-question the weary mother again. He had drawn his revolver and pointed it at her breast.

The lawyer beckoned to another Klansman and when he demanded the reason for his summons, Craig whispered:

"I think we've found him—"

"Where?"

"Outside."

Eager to win his leader's praise, the Klansman followed quickly. Logan rapped him and the two quickly bound and gagged and rolled him against his fallen comrades.

The trick was thus repeated until but two remained standing—the leader and his orderly.

Logan and Craig entered the living-room and stood in silence watching the scene. The leader again gripped the woman's wrist and twisted it until she screamed.

Logan's hand moved toward his revolver and his Chief caught it:

"Steady, I'll give the order."

The last scream had its desired effect. Nathan, unable longer to endure the torture of his wife, suddenly opened the closet door, pushed the bureau aside and rushed to her.

"They shall not torture you, Sarah," he said firmly, as he slipped between his wife and her tormentor.

The black hood laughed.

The wife seized her husband's hand and sobbed:

"Oh, Nathan, Nathan, why did you come!"

"Sh—my dear—" he whispered.

"So you have not left town yet, Father Abraham?" the leader sneered.

Klein looked straight into the eyes of the mask without a word.

"But you'll be going soon," snarled the black hood close to his face.

Craig and Logan had worked their way, unnoticed, into the scene. The lawyer stood just behind the leader. Logan covered his orderly.

Old Nathan drew his drooping shoulders erect, faced his assailant and calmly said:

"I, too, am an American citizen—"

"Sure—" answered the hood. He accompanied the answer with a vicious blow. The ugly fist had scarcely touched the calm face when Logan's blackjack descended on the head of the orderly with a dull thud. He dropped as Craig leaped on the leader and pinioned his arms while Logan tied them.

The leader's eyes glared in fury at his assailants.

"What'ell is this?" he growled.

The two men uncovered and faced the astounded raider. The lawyer tore the black hood from his head and re-

vealed the ugly features of Lowery. He bent close and said in low tones:

"Just a little joke, my prowling friend. We slipped around to-night to show you that when you put on that black hood and set out to regulate the world, there are others who can play the same game."

The tough's face was a study in anger and a coward's fear. He had never been afraid of Wilkes. He had always kept out of Craig's way. He had tried twice to join the Klan in the old days and had been told by Craig each time to keep out. The two men had not faced each other since the last interview on this subject in the lawyer's office. The tough saw that his tragic hour had struck. He began to whine.

"We're just out for a little fun. We didn't mean any harm."

Craig saw the end of a horsewhip protruding from Lowery's belt and seized it. He held the cruel lash up in the lamplight.

"I suppose this was a present for the little boy? It'll come in handy to-night!"

Klein had lifted his wife from the chair and held her sobbing form in his arms.

"There—there—Sarah. God heard our cry and sent us deliverance. We give praise to his Holy Name. Lift up your head. The servant of the Lord is here—"

He led her to a chair and seized Craig's hand.

"Words fail, my good friend. You have saved us—" his voice broke—"God—bless—you—"

Craig swung Lowery around suddenly and brought the two men together. The raider's twisted, knotted features, pockmarked and red with liquor; the Jew's fine Christlike face in startling contrast to the beast beside him.

Craig folded his arms and looked at the two. He stared at Lowery and slowly said:

"God chose a Jewish girl to be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world and *you* strike a Jew!"

The tough scowled and squirmed under the steady gaze until his eyes sought the floor.

The prostrate figure of the orderly stirred. Logan kicked him to his feet. He had already disarmed, tied and gagged him.

Sammy, drawn near to Craig and with eyes wide in wonder and love, stood gazing. He lifted the limp body of his four-footed friend and tried to explain but his voice failed. He could not tell the story.

Logan asked:

"Who killed him?"

The boy's face flamed with anger as he sprang forward and pointed to Lowery.

"That man with the double cross on his breast—"

He had scarcely spoken when Logan swung the tough round with his left hand and kicked him through the back door, covering him with his revolver. The dazed orderly, tied and gagged, meekly followed.

Craig pressed a revolver into the hand of Klein.

"Never open that door again," he commanded. "Use your gun from the windows and through the panels. From to-night you are a member of my vigilantes."

He took the pistol and promised to obey his orders.

From the door Craig called:

"I've some work to do. I'll see you later."

The danger over, the boy looked at his dead pet and broke again into sobs.

"There—there—" his father soothed. "I'll give you a fine pony and you'll have four swift feet to carry you instead of that lame leg—hush now—that's a good boy—"

The young face brightened for a moment and then the tears blinded him again. He heard the sharp orders of Craig outside, pulled himself together, walked to the rear door and looked out. Logan had gotten the dazed raiders on their feet, tied them in a row, with Lowery in the rear. He arranged them thus so that he could kick the tough every time he thought of the dog.

At Craig's sharp command, with a kick from Logan, the procession moved silently through the deserted streets to Wilkes' house. The rich young slacker had built a pretentious modern "mansion" in the new rich quarter of the town. It stood about two hundred feet from the sidewalk. The intervening space was laid out in imitation of the formal gardens of the North.

On the left of the huge gate which opened in the center, Wilkes had built an iron hitching rack for the use of horseback riders. It stood fully nine feet tall and from the girder chains were suspended with snap hooks that could be instantly fastened to a horse's bridle.

It formed a perfect gallows for the squadron of raiders. Logan obeyed the orders of his Chief to line them up under this rack with a grim laugh. It was exactly what he was going to suggest.

He quickly adjusted a rope around Lowery's neck, threw it over the beam and had begun to pull before Craig could stop him.

"Not that—Ben—no," he protested.

"Why not?"

"We'll swing them by the thumbs—"

"Ah, don't bother me!" the countryman cried. "Take a walk—"

"I mean it," Craig insisted.

"Let this bunch of rattlesnakes loose with a warning? Not on your life! When you get your heel on a snake's

head, it's a duty to God to mash it. I'm a-goin' ter do my Christian duty—"

Again he pulled on Lowery's line and Craig caught his arm firmly.

"I've given you orders."

"Oh, for God's sake, Chief," he pleaded, "have a heart. You're goin' to spoil my whole evenin'. This wuz my hunch an' it's worked out beautiful. It's the Providence o' God, I tell ye. These seven blackbirds hangin' on that limb in the mornin'll bring peace an' quiet to the whole country. You're flyin' in the face o' Providence. Hit ain't right. Hit ain't lawful—"

"It's best," Craig interrupted firmly.

Logan studied his Chief in despair. He had never seen him more set. He realized finally that his plan of hanging the seven of them by the neck was impossible. He sought a fair compromise.

"Let me swing the leader by the neck, anyhow?"

"No—"

"Lemme shoot at him once in the dark—I couldn't hit him in this poor light."

"No—"

"You're hard on this here community, Chief. Hit's a sinful thing ter let these devils live. I warn ye before God that you're committin' a crime—"

Craig lifted his hand in a stern gesture and Logan ceased to plead. He quickly tied their thumbs, and stretched them from the beams. The lawyer handed him the vicious horsewhip, which he had taken from Lowery.

"You can give them each forty-nine lashes if it will cheer you any."

The countryman rolled up his sleeve and softly laughed.

"That'll help some."

He ripped their coats and shirts, bared each back, and

rolled up their trouser legs until the bare flesh glistened in the moonlight. He began on Lowery and lashed him with his own whip until he begged and whined for mercy.

When he had finished with the leader he whispered to Craig:

"Lemme shoot at him in the dark—once—jest fer luck?"

The lawyer shook his head and he went back to his job and finished it with quiet joy. The last man yelled so loudly that Wilkes, seated in his big library at the back of his house, heard it.

He rushed down to the gate and gazed with amazement at the white swinging figures. He faced Craig angrily.

"How dare you swing these men in front of my door?"

"Because I'm a man of my word," was the steady answer.

"I have nothing to do with these fools," Wilkes protested.

"You have everything to do with them," Craig sharply replied. "You organized them. You took in the riffraff, ragtag and bobtail of the county—any skunk that had a vote. You made these disguises. You clothed these scoundrels with them. And you are responsible for every crime committed by the men who wear them—"

He paused.

"Another raid in this county and I'll hang you—by the neck—not thumbs—good night."

CHAPTER XX

A SOCIAL FUNCTION

LOWERY left the county before dawn and the warning which Craig had given his enemy bore quick fruit. The story of the raid on Klein, and its dramatic ending with the raiders raided, was published in every newspaper in the state. Its effect was electrical. The Klan suddenly ceased to function as an instrument of revenge and adventure. It settled into a social function with an occasional touch of comedy.

The boys who had failed in their call on Julius, the night they found Henry at the wrong door, persisted in repeating their summons to the Apostle. He had begun a series of revival meetings in the Northern Methodist church, calling its members to come up higher. With each night his fervor increased until he announced not only his sinless perfection and apostolic call, but the fact that he was in daily personal communion with Jehovah himself. Amid a chorus of "Amens" and "Glory-hallelujahs" from the sisters he boldly declared:

"Hear de Lawd's messenger. I'se straight from him. De Lawd come every day ter my house. I sees him wid my own eyes. De debbil doan pester me no mo', de Lawd's sanctified one. I done wipe my weepin' eyes an' gone up on high. Will ye come wid me breddren an' sisters? I walk in de cool er de mawnin' an' de shank er de evenin' wid de Lawd and de Lawd walks wid me. An' I ain't er skeered er nuttin' in heaben above er hell below—"

He had scarcely uttered the words when a white-robed ghost seven feet high walked down the aisle. There was a moment of awful silence. Julius' jaw dropped in terror. A sister in the "amen" corner screamed. The Apostle sprang through the window behind the pulpit, carrying the sash with him. In a minute the church was empty and the revival of Sanctification had come to an untimely end.

It became the fashion for boys masquerading in Klan costume to call in groups on the girls and offer their protection. They usually spent the evening making merry. The mystery attending such meetings, the signs and passwords in use, and the call of whistles lent the needed air of romance. These visits came to be prized as tributes to charm and beauty.

A sign of invitation was devised by order of the leader of the youthful raiders and posted one night on the bulletin board of the post office. The girl who wished the honor of such a call had only to express it by walking through the main street to the post office with a scarlet bow of ribbon on her left arm, and on the night following, at ten o'clock, the young knights on their white-robed horses would call.

Claudia had become the most popular girl in Independence, in spite of her father's politics. Her charm was resistless. The boy on whom she chose to smile became her friend and champion. The old Craig house was now the popular meeting place of the youth and beauty of the town. The only man not welcome there was its real owner.

Wilkes led the devoted circle of her admirers, each day pressing his suit with dogged persistence. She smiled at his surrender but continued to keep him at arm's length.

She determined to crown her social leadership with a

fancy dress ball, inviting the Klan masqueraders to dance at her home. The Klan was too deep a mystery for her to note the difference in the character of the raids since the night its horsemen had cheered at her father's gate. She only knew in a general way that the order was born in the unconquerable spirit of the old Bourbon South, the South of her mother, the only South worth cultivating socially.

Radiant and smiling, she walked down main street with the scarlet sign of the Klan on her left arm and stopped the business of the town.

Her name was on every lip. If the raiders should accept her invitation, and appear at the old Craig house the following evening, the Judge would be in the anomalous position of a host who seeks the life of his guests.

Before Claudia reached home the town was excitedly inquiring whether the Judge had given his consent to this daring act. The older heads were sure that it was a child's thoughtless whim and that Hawkins would promptly stop it.

Craig heard the news the following morning. He saw in this invitation the triumph of the man he was coming to hate with a deeper loathing than he had ever felt for her father. He was sure it was an inspiration of Wilkes.

He observed Blackmar talking earnestly to Julius on the other side of the street, and began to regret that a regiment of United States troops had been removed from the district to Greensboro on the carpetbagger's advice.

Were they here, he would suggest to the Judge that they be stationed about his home and all masked fools be kept out. He resented the masquerade, not only because it was a travesty of the tragic drama in which he had played a part, but because he felt a deep sense of fore-

boding over its possible outcome. However harmless the intentions of the leader of such a prank, there was always the chance of a drunken fool among them.

He sat down and hastily wrote a note of warning to Hawkins without signature, tore it up in anger and threw it in his waste basket.

"It's nonsense!" he muttered in rage. "Her father is in no danger. The trouble is with me—I'm jealous, jealous, jealous—of the men who can see her. I want to dance with her myself—"

Yet the longer he brooded over the thing, the keener became his sense of its dangers, and the more oppressive the fear that it might result in a tragedy.

He should warn the Judge. For a moment the feud was forgotten. The old hook-beaked scoundrel was *her* father. He had his good points too. Compared to the fat-faced coward who was courting his daughter, he was a prince among men.

The thing that really worried him was not so much what might happen to Hawkins, as what might happen to the girl he loved through him. An injury to the Judge would be a blow at her heart. He recalled the girlish tenderness with which she kissed her father the night they met.

He seized his hat and walked quickly toward the house. He passed Klein's gate on the way. There was excitement in front of it. The mother stood smiling as Klein lifted Sammy to the back of a sleek pony, trapped in a shining new saddle. The bridle was trimmed in silver. The martingales were strung through silver rings, each hung with a silver tassel. The boy's face was wreathed in joy as he settled in the saddle and his father fixed the lame foot firmly in the stirrup.

"Look, Mr. Craig!" Sammy called. "He's mine—father just gave him to me!"

The lawyer paused and stroked the sleek neck of the pony.

"He's a beauty."

"He's as gentle as a cat," the boy went on eagerly, "and they say he can outgallop any horse in the county—"

Craig hurried on with a wave of his arm, little dreaming the part those swift hoofs were destined to play in a crisis of his life toward which he was rapidly moving.

He hesitated at the gate of his old home with a sickening dread of an unkind word from Claudia. An insult would be a cruel thing to bear. In his daydreams of her he had always seen her face wreathed in smiles as it had been the night they met. He dreaded the memory of her frown. But it couldn't be helped. If it had to be he would face it. He must warn her father. He lifted the latch, entered and walked quickly to the door.

As he rang the bell, he wiped the perspiration from his face. It was silly but he was in a panic of fear at meeting a girl. A soft wind was blowing from the south. The perfume of flowers from the garden filled his nostrils and choked him. Flowers meant beauty, home, love, trust, tenderness. He was marching into a scene of ignoble strife with the woman he loved. He mopped his brow again. The sweat poured down his face and neck.

Aunt Laura opened the door. There was a look of uneasiness in her friendly eyes that distressed him anew. She was evidently under some sort of restraint.

"Come in, Marse John," she said slowly. "I tell Miss Claudy right away."

He started to say that he had called to see the Judge but it would never do to let a servant know of trouble

between them. Besides, while he dreaded the meeting, his heart was beating a tattoo at the thought of seeing her. He tried to say something about the Judge but his lips didn't move.

He fumbled his hat and stood looking at his mother's portrait sunk deep into the panel over the fireplace. A flood of tenderness swept him. To the devil with strife and feuds! He wanted a sweetheart, a wife, a home, a baby. He heard the rustle of silk on the stairs, turned and saw Claudia coming. Her head was high, her figure erect, cool, poised, hostile.

It was worse than his fears. He dreaded to speak. He dreaded to hear her voice. It came at last in polite, even, impersonal tones that cut deeper than anger.

"Why this call to-day, Mr. Craig—under such conditions?"

He started to apologize and stopped. It was senseless. It could do no good. Besides, as he looked at her enraptured, he could think only of the danger to her happiness which a tragedy in that house would mean. Moved by his love, he spoke in pleading tones:

"I have come to beg of you not to allow those masqueraders here to-night—"

The girl's features stiffened.

"And why?"

"This campaign is at the boiling point," he hurried on. "Your father is a candidate for Governor. His speeches have been bold to the point of recklessness. He has many enemies inside his own party as well as outside. Among these masked men may come an enemy—"

Claudia lifted her hand with a gesture of impatience.

"I appreciate your anxiety about my father—"

She paused and a queer little smile played around the corners of her lips. Craig blushed. He longed to swear

to her that he was honest in his desire to protect him for her sake. Yet it was impossible. Certainly it was not the moment for a declaration of love to this proud and sensitive girl. She saw his confusion and softened the irony from her voice.

"I assure you there's not the slightest danger in such a function. I have attended several."

He watched her steadily and said:

"Your father agrees with you in this?"

She laughed softly.

"I haven't consulted him yet. He has just returned from his circuit this morning. Would you like to tell him about it?"

The challenge had crept back into her voice. Her words were carefully chosen. And they cut. But the thing was too important for compromise. He could not stand on ceremony. He pulled himself together and answered steadily:

"I will talk to him for a moment if you'll be kind enough to call him—"

"Certainly—

She stepped to the stairs and called her father. The tones were clear, tender, and silvery with girlish banter. They found his heart. He cursed the fate that had made it necessary to hurt her.

Hawkins came down immediately, looked in amazement at Craig, and turned to Claudia.

"What on earth—"

Craig dreaded to hear her bantering explanation and plunged at once into his message.

"I—I have come, Judge Hawkins, to ask your daughter to please stop preparations for the Klan ball here to-night—"

Hawkins flushed with excitement and turned again to Claudia.

"A Klan masquerade—here—my dear?" he faltered.

The girl saw his deep agitation and spoke assuringly.

"Why, it's all the rage now, father—"

The Judge frowned, lifted his hand for silence and turned to Craig.

"I thank you. I'll not forget your thoughtfulness, sir. It was kind of you."

The girl's lips tightened at the rebuke. She smiled and turned to Craig in a way that plainly said: "Now that you've started a fight between my father and me—suppose you go."

He bowed awkwardly and passed out. As the door closed, Claudia smiled at her father. The smile was not returned. Hawkins was trembling. When she laid her hand on his arm and began to explain, he cut her short with the first angry command he had ever given:

"You must stop this thing at once, my child—"

"But I can't stop it, now—"

"You must."

"The boys will be here at nine o'clock—"

"You must turn them from the door."

"But, father—dear—"

"You should have consulted me—"

"How could I? You were away. You made me the mistress of your house. Why consult you about a harmless social gathering of boys and girls?"

"The Ku Klux Klan is a secret order of oathbound assassins—"

"Please, father, don't!" she laughed. "These boys are of the best families in town."

"How can you know this?" pleaded the Judge. "They

come disguised. Not one of them will make himself known."

"Which makes the romance all the deeper."

"And its dangers the greater—"

"But you are not really afraid?" cried Claudia.

"You have heard of the outrages committed by these masked raiders?"

"Not these boys—"

"You must remember, my dear, that I have sworn to send these men to the gallows. You cannot see that their presence in this house would be an insult to me?"

"Certainly not. They come to do me honor."

"You must stop it, my child—"

"It is impossible. My friends are getting ready. I've hired the band."

"Come, my dear, you must be reasonable. I know I've spoiled you. I've loved you too well. I've indulged every whim of your heart and allowed you to rule me, but you can't do this absurd and dangerous thing. You forget that you are not only making a fool of me but that you are putting my life in jeopardy."

"I'll assume the responsibility—" she broke in smiling. "If you receive the slightest insult or a hair of your head is harmed I'll give my life to avenge it."

The Judge hesitated a moment and then said with stern determination:

"For the first time in my life, I forbid you a thing on which you have set your heart. These masked men shall not enter my house!"

Claudia stared at him, burst into tears, and sank to a seat.

Hawkins wrung his hands helplessly and walked to the stairs. It was unthinkable that he should give in on such an issue. He would be firm. He put his foot on the

first step, paused and looked back. The bowed figure was sobbing pitifully. The first and only tears he had ever caused her in all his life. And she had no mother to tell her troubles to.

He stood torn between love—foolish, indulgent, tender—and a duty hard and cold. He took his foot off the stairs and watched her until his eyes grew dim. He walked slowly back, touched her shoulder, stooped and kissed her hair.

She smiled through her tears and said:

"I'll turn the boys away from the door—"

She took his outstretched hand. He lifted her and slipped an arm about her waist.

"No, darling, it's all right. You shall have your fun—"

Her arms slowly stole around his neck and she kissed him. She was not demonstrative. She rarely kissed him except under deep emotion. The touch of her lips were never so sweet to his stormy spirit. He had hurt her cruelly. She had forgiven. He wouldn't do such a fool thing again. A woman's intuitions could be trusted in such matters. He should have thought of that at first. He stroked her shining brown hair and laughed.

"I reckon you'll know how to take care of your daddy in the scrimmage?"

"I'll show you that I do!" she cried gayly.

She hurried upstairs to complete her preparations. But the smile on Hawkins' face slowly faded into a look of deep seriousness.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MASKED BALL

CRAIG walked to his office with a sense of relief that he had gotten off so lightly in his encounter with Claudia. She had not uttered an angry word. She had not shown any hatred. He wondered after all if that were a good sign. Had she loved him she might have shown the most violent anger. If he could only know that she cared a little, she might rave all she liked.

Her indifference was ominous. She neither liked nor disliked him. He simply didn't count in her life. The thought made him ill. A feeling of depression swept him. He walked three miles in the country and back again swiftly. He couldn't throw his depression off. He had no right to expect anything of her but indifference, yet he did.

As the hour approached for the masqueraders to appear at the Judge's Craig was drawn to the spot by an irresistible impulse. He stood in the shadows of the trees on the sidewalk and watched a little squadron of white horsemen wheel into the gate past Julius' cottage, and gallop swiftly up to the front door of the old mansion.

They had scarcely passed when Julius suddenly stepped from the shrubbery, through the open gateway, and ran into him.

The Apostle gasped in terror.

"De Lawd, Marse John, I thought you wuz one er dem ghostes—'scuse me, sah, I'se er gettin' away from here!"

Craig made no reply, merely watching him until he disappeared.

Again he turned toward the house. Every window was gleaming with light. A man passed the gate, and, scarcely knowing what he did, he strolled into the lawn and sank on a rustic bench. He could hear the gay banter of the masqueraders and the peals of girlish laughter with which their tomfoolery was being received.

A bird began singing in the tree above him, roused by the music of the band. Far off in the corner of the lawn, in the clump of holly and cedars at the entrance of the vault, a whippoorwill was making the shadows ring with the weird notes of his ghostlike call. The moon flooded the scene with splendor. Crushed with a sense of loneliness and failure, he felt to-night that he would give the world for one touch of the hand of the girl whose laughter lingered and echoed in his heart. The feeling of impending disaster overwhelmed him.

"Of course it's nonsense!" he kept repeating to himself. "The disaster is within. I'm just a wounded animal caught in a trap. No one knows or cares, and I can't cry for help."

He tried to rise and go. But something held him in a spell to the spot. He sat dreaming out each movement of the gay drama in progress within the house.

Claudia was welcoming her white-robed guests without the aid of a servant. No negro could be hired for love or money to approach these ghostly figures. Maggie had hidden in the closet in her mistress's room and Aunt Laura had barred herself inside the kitchen and had refused to answer a call.

In spite of these little annoyances the young mistress of the house, resplendent in her ball costume, was in her gayest mood.

When the shrill whistle rang the summons at the door, she hastened to greet her mysterious guest.

"And your name, Sir Knight?" she asked with bantering laughter.

"We are Ghouls! And come from beyond the river Styx, my lady!" solemnly answered a white figure.

"Welcome, Shades of Darkness, to the world of joy and light, song and dance, life and love!" Claudia cried, extending her hand.

When they had tied their horses to the posts beside the wide driveway, they slowly entered single file into the great hall. Claudia greeted each with words of gay welcome.

They were dressed in the regulation raider's costume of the old Klan. The white, flowing, ulsterlike robe came within three inches of the floor. A scarlet belt circled the waist, from either side of which hung revolvers in leather holsters. A dagger was attached to the center of the belt, and the scarlet-lined white cape thrown back on the shoulders revealed their militant trappings with startling distinctness. On each breast was wrought the emblem of the Invisible Empire, the scarlet circle, and in its center a cross. The spiked helmet of the old Klan was used by these boys—and its flowing masks reached to the cape on each shoulder, completely covering the head and face. With red gauntlets to complete their costume, the disguise was perfect. The only visible part of the body was the eyes, gleaming with brilliance through the holes cut in the mask. It was a curious fact that all eyes looked alike in the shadows of these trappings at night. They were simply flashing points of light with all traces of color lost in the shadows.

In spite of the fact that the girls felt they had nothing to fear from the white figures, it was with a tremor of

excitement they each greeted a mysterious partner of the dance.

Claudia left them talking romantic nonsense of knights and tournaments, ghouls and ghosts, and ran up to her father's room.

"Oh! Papa," she cried with glee. "It's such fun. They're all here. You will come down and join the party as you promised?"

"Yes, yes, dear, I'll come, presently," said the Judge with evident dread.

Claudia slipped her bare arm around his neck and her cheek rested against his, while the soft fingers found his hand.

"I'm awfully sorry I was so ugly to-day," she said gently. "But I couldn't help it. I didn't know I had a temper. I must have gotten it from you, Dad."

"It's all right, my darling," he said tenderly.

"I'll be good now, if you'll forgive me?"

Her father answered with a kiss. "You see, you're all I have in the world, my little girl. I'm not as strong as I used to be."

"Rubbish! You've just got the blues. Shake them off and be young again to-night. Imagine you are a boy here with mother the sweetheart you stole from the proud people who hated you—come, come!"

The Judge smiled in spite of himself. Her mood was contagious. He stroked her hand gently.

"I'll be down right away. Run on and have a good time."

"All right, we're only waiting for the band."

The band had given Claudia her only worry. Everything else had gone like clockwork. She had engaged the colored string band to furnish the music. Late in the afternoon they had learned that the Klan would be there

and had canceled the engagement. She sent for the leader, showed him the ballroom and the platform erected for the musicians and explained to him the real character of the fun.

"Sho dey ain't goin' ter be no real Ku Kluxes here?" he asked doubtfully.

"Of course not—only a lot of rollicking boys in costume—"

He promised faithfully to come. Claudia had watched in vain for them. She went finally to the back door and peered out to see if they were there. She heard Aunt Laura's voice boom from the kitchen door.

"You don't need me ter show ye de way. Go right in de back do—"

They hung back doubtfully. Claudia could see their eyes shining in the light from the kitchen window. They were jolly fun-loving fellows but they were scared.

Claudia tipped down the steps and called:

"Come on, you boys—we're waiting!"

At the sight of her smiling face and exquisite dress their spirits revived. They answered promptly:

"Comin', lady—comin'!"

"Nothing but a lot of boys dressed up as Klansmen—" she assured.

From the doorway they saw a shrouded figure and stopped, huddled together. Claudia pointed to the ballroom.

"Hurry now—hurry—we're waiting."

When they continued to hang back she took the leader by the arm and led him into the ballroom. The others followed gingerly.

They took their places on the platform. They grouped themselves as near the window as possible. Each man took the pains to measure the leap to the ground outside

before taking his seat. They began to tune up and the sound of the strings relieved the strained nerves. They felt that the soft strains of their violins would soothe the souls of the goblins. They touched their instruments timidly at first and then with more confidence. With every string taut, the leader signaled and they rendered their overture with fine effect.

Craig heard the strains of the violins floating through the open windows and his heart began to pound. He was too miserable to endure it. He glanced toward the gate and rose. Two men were just entering. They were not in costume—friends of the Judge, perhaps. He hoped they were guards.

Not wishing to be seen, he strolled through the shrubbery, avoided the men and passed out by the carriage-way.

The two dark figures turned to the right. He failed to see whether they followed the graveled walk which wound around the fountain toward the house, or kept to the right toward the family vault.

As a matter of fact they turned across the grass sharply to the right and kept the shrubbery between them and the lights from the windows.

Julius was showing his friend the family burying ground. He paused at a respectable distance from the vault entrance and pointed to the door.

"Yer go right in dat door. Hit's neber locked. Round behind de coffins on de left dey's er arch in de wall. You push ag'in hit an' hit opens. Go right on fru de passage-way into de house. De do' opens under de stairs in de big hall—"

"How does it open?" Blackmar asked.

"Yer des push, atter yer tech de spring on de left—"

"All right, come on," the carpetbagger said, moving forward.

Julius hung back. Blackmar turned and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Dat's a graveyard in dar, man, an' hit's dark—"

"So much the better—no one can see us."

"Yes—but what I gwine ter see in dar next dem corpses?"

Blackmar gripped the black exhorter's shoulder and spoke sternly:

"Remember you are my brother and my equal!"

"What good dat gwine ter do ef a ghost git me in de gills?"

"There are no such things as ghosts."

"How 'bout de Holy Ghost?"

Blackmar's patience was exhausted. But he made one more effort.

"A man of Holiness need not fear to meet even Him—you are sanctified, are you not?"

"Oh, yessah, I knows I'se sanctified till I git in a dark lonesome place lak dat—and den I has my suspicions—"

"You've got to come and show me the way," Blackmar sternly commanded. "I'm going to get those things from Hawkins to-night. It's my one chance and I'm not going to lose it. He always carries them in his pocket."

He paused and glared at Julius.

"Come on!" he ordered.

Julius drew back. Blackmar seized and dragged him inside without further ceremony. The negro fought and begged.

"God save me—I tell ye dat's a graveyard."

He was still repeating the warning when he opened his eyes on the coffin doors. Blackmar had thrust him inside,

closed the door, barred it with his tall figure and struck a match.

"Now, put on that disguise, and be quick about it!" the carpetbagger commanded.

He handed a Klan costume to Julius. His teeth were chattering, but he took it and mechanically followed the example of his captor. In a moment the thing was over his shoulders and a white hood adjusted on his head.

Blackmar took no chances of his running. He made the Apostle go before and show him each step of the way.

The ball was in full swing. The negro leader had at last forgotten all fear, and pompously called the numbers, his laughing eyes rolling in joy.

The Judge, dressed in a broadcloth coat which hung in slouching lines from his big shoulders, slowly descended the stairs. He stood embarrassed in the hall a moment, and sat down by a table.

A masquerader came in from the ballroom for the fan his partner had left, and, so soft was his footfall, the Judge did not see him until the white figure suddenly loomed above him to pick up the fan.

The apparition was so startling that his nerves snapped. He leaped to his feet trembling.

The masquerader laughed and said:

"I beg your pardon. I only wanted a fan."

Hawkins stammered.

"Ah—I—must have been dreaming—you—startled me!"

He watched the shrouded figure disappear, mopped his brow and hurried upstairs to get another drink.

Wilkes, in high feather, led Claudia into the shadows of the rose trellis on the porch and removed his mask. He seized her hand and held up the ring which she had given back to him.

"Let me?" he breathed.

She laughed and shook her head.

"No, I'll keep my freedom, George. I enjoy it."

Wilkes frowned and studied her keenly.

"Is there anybody else?"

"I don't know," she answered soberly. "I wonder sometimes."

He pressed his suit eagerly. Claudia laughingly said "No," and drew him back into the ballroom.

As they passed through the hall, the band struck up a waltz. Wilkes' arm circled his partner and they danced into the main ballroom. Hawkins, coming down the stairs again, caught sight of his daughter, paused and waved to her. Her hand fluttered in response, anl he felt repaid for the torture of the evening. She was the center of all eyes to-night. The fairest among the fair. He could feel from the spirit of the crowd that it was a success. Her name was on every lip.

While he stood brooding on the stairway, the little door in the wainscoting below the stairs softly opened and a masked figure looked out. As the Judge came down into the alcove, the door was quickly closed.

He walked straight into the alcove as the safest place against unpleasant surprises. He glanced at the dancers, took his seat beside the table and lighted a cigar. His back was toward the panel. He faced the ballroom.

Two shrouded figures stealthily entered through the little door and stood in silence, watching the Judge's slouching figure in the foreground and the flash of the gay dancers through the doors beyond.

The band could plainly be seen on their high platform, playing with abandon. Their passionate love of music and the fun of the dance had drowned all fears. They played with pep. Their eyes rolled until the whites

showed a halo around each black pupil. They kept time with their feet and their bodies swayed in ecstatic rhythm. The big negro playing the bass viol began at last to cut monkeyshines with his fiddle. He struck the box with the bow, drew a sharp stroke across the strings, and twisted the violin round and round. He laughed and talked to his instrument in weird voodoo tones.

As the dancers whirled past, they urged him on.

The two figures in the background moved quickly before Hawkins and cut off his view of the ballroom. He looked up in surprise, blinked and laughed. He would not give these boys another laugh on him. He would laugh with them. He made no further sound, waiting for them to speak. He shifted his big cigar to the other corner of his mouth and smoked vigorously.

A masked head was thrust suddenly into his face and the piercing eyes held him. He tried to laugh again and failed.

"Oh, I see," he stammered, "you boys are going to initiate me—give me the third degree—first—I see—a good joke."

"You may find it a serious joke—if you're not in a hurry to turn everything in your pockets over to me—" the masked hood breathed, bending close.

"Well, gentlemen, have your fun," the Judge cried with forced gayety. "Have your way. I am at your service. How much is the price I must pay to-night for my many sins against the Klan?"

The masked figure pressed Hawkins roughly against the table. He still tried to laugh it off—until the fumbling, nervous hand of his assailant felt in his breast pockets and sought their contents. He seized the hand and held it.

"Gentlemen, your joke is going too far—"

"It'll go further," the masked voice cried, and again a hand was thrust deep into his pocket.

Hawkins leaped to his feet, his face flushed, his tones vibrant with anger.

"That'll do now—get out!"

The figure still pressed him against the table. With a sudden move of his right hand, Hawkins snatched the mask from the intruder and fell back with a low cry of surprise and horror.

"Blackmar!"

A knife flashed and found his heart. He reeled, staggered, clutched the table and his sinking body dropped into the armchair beside it. Blackmar quickly replaced his mask, tore from the Judge's pockets the photograph with its fatal inscription, and retreated to the little door under the stairs. His companion had already opened the door and stood trembling in terror.

"For God's sake, man—hurry—hurry—"

Blackmar's hand closed over his mouth.

"Shut up," he growled, as the little door closed behind him.

Hawkins vainly gasped for breath, lifted his long arm toward the ballroom and tried to cry for help. The arm fell back limp, his head rolled sideways. Only a groan moved his lips.

A pretty girl stole from the dance for a talk with her lover in the quiet of the alcove. She saw the Judge gasping for breath, his legs sprawled, his arms hanging by his side, turned in horror and rushed back to find Claudia. Her masked escort stood staring at the prostrate figure.

The girl found Claudia dancing with Wilkes and whispered excitedly:

"Come quick—your father's hurt—in the hall—"

She passed swiftly through the crowd while Wilkes followed.

Hawkins, gasping again for breath, tore at his throat, revealing the dark bloodstain on his shirt just over the heart. His daughter stared a moment in dumb horror, slipped her arm around his neck, held his head and murmured:

"For God's sake, daddy dear, what is it? What's happened?"

At the touch of her hand and the sound of her loved voice he tried to speak and failed. He lifted his head and it drooped.

Claudia turned to the girl.

"Stop the music—oh, stop the music—"

The girl ran into the ballroom and lifted her hand to the musicians.

"Stop it—stop the music!"

The leader's eyes widened. The music stopped with a crash.

"What's the matter?" a dancer cried.

"The Judge has been stabbed!" the girl gasped.

The musicians stared at the confused mass in the ballroom. The leader suddenly leaped through the open window and the whole band followed.

As two unmasked figures emerged from the vault, Blackmar seized the negro's arm and shook him.

"Pull yourself together now, you fool, or we'll both be hung!"

"Yassah—I knows that," faltered Julius. "I des been selectin' de color o' my coffin!"

Blackmar scribbled a line on a card and pressed it into his hand with two twenty-dollar bills.

"Here's the address in Columbia, S. C., and here's money. Go there on the train to-night. Stay until I

send for you. Don't you dare come back into the state till I tell you it's all right—"

Julius stood in dumb misery and slowly followed the carpetbagger through the shrubbery.

When Claudia had recovered from the first shock, she turned to Wilkes who had unmasked.

"A doctor—quick—"

Wilkes rushed for the door and Claudia again slipped her arm around her father's neck. With a lace handkerchief she wiped the stains from his face. The hand that clutched at his heart had carried the stains to his throat and cheeks.

She pressed her face against his and the tears blinded her. Hawkins, with an effort, lifted his hand and touched her hair.

A cry of anguish came through her set lips in spite of her effort at control. The fingers on her hair trembled in a tender gesture of love.

She begged her father to live.

"Oh, daddy dear, please live and let me show you how sorry I am that this has happened through me. Let me show you how much I love you—"

His strength flared for an instant. He stroked her hair and smiled tenderly. He tried to speak and couldn't. She bent low and listened eagerly, to catch the faintest word. He tried to tell her of the crime, but all he said was:

"Masked—masked—"

The big head sank on her breast. His body quivered. The girl's face blanched in the presence of Death. She felt the white messenger at her side, as he laid his cold hand on the sinking shoulder. She ceased to sob, lowered the head against the armchair and slowly rose to her feet.

Her face hardened as she saw the huddled crowd of masked figures. She pointed to the door and said:

"Go—please—"

In painful silence they hurried out talking in excited whispers. A cloud obscured the moon and wrapped the house in deep shadows. The bird that had been singing in opposition to the band stopped when the white figures swarmed across the lawn. A weird silence fell on the scene, broken at last by the neighing of a restless, robed horse.

Claudia heard the tremulous animal cry in the dark outside and suddenly drew herself erect, her face set in a new life purpose. A gentle voice within breathed the warning: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord—" But the voice was smothered in the fierce cry of outraged love, and the resolution taken that would yet overwhelm her own soul in disaster.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TAINTED AIR

THE next morning, Blackmar was the first to call on Claudia. He offered his sympathy and untiring efforts to avenge her father's death. His manner was so sincere, his words so convincing she had decided to place the whole affair in his hands, when a single note of calculation in his voice stopped her. Sure of his success, he suddenly suggested to her that as Chairman of the Executive Committee of their party he would arrange a state funeral and make this murder the one issue of the campaign.

The girl threw him a quick glance of suspicion. She had not slept all night. The long vigil alone in her room had sharpened her senses. Every nerve was taut. Every faculty tense with an unnatural power. Her intuitions were never so keen. She studied the fine face of the old soldier of fortune. His piercing eyes met hers without flinching. Yet, somewhere in their depths, she caught the flicker of a false signal. She felt it vaguely, but it was enough to make her hesitate for a moment in her answer.

Blackmar was quick to catch the flash of suspicion, and made another mistake in his eagerness to correct his first blunder. His safety lay in first disarming every suspicion on the part of Claudia. He hastened to explain his larger purpose in the suggestion.

"I know you may suspect my motives as a political rival of your father's, Miss Claudia. But you must believe me when I tell you that, in the shadow of this crime, all the

little differences between us are forgotten. The dead man is the martyr of our cause. We stand for law and order. I can rally at his grave ten thousand men from every quarter of the state. I can start a crusade that will end in certain victory—"

The girl's head suddenly lifted. She spoke slowly, her right hand still uplifted for silence.

"You were my father's chief rival for the nomination, were you not?"

"Yes, but—"

She silenced him again and went on evenly.

"You will probably be nominated in his place. I will not permit my father's funeral to be made a place for stump speeches—nor allow a rival to take advantage of it to win office."

"I am sorry you feel like this," Blackmar sighed in agreement with her decision. "At least, I may invite a hundred or more of our leaders to act as honorary pall-bearers?"

Her face slowly hardened.

"Not one, please. The funeral will be conducted as quietly as possible here. Those of his personal friends who wish can attend. I will not have it made into a political rally."

Blackmar was puzzled. It was preposterous to think that she suspected the truth. Her opposition was the reflection of her antagonism aroused on the day of the convention. Perhaps he had overplayed his part in expressing his sympathy and indignation. On second thought he knew that he had not. It was simply a case of a woman's supersensitive mind. In her subconscious being she had sensed his hatred of the Judge. It was useless to argue or plead. He felt the ring of steel in her words.

"There is nothing then that I can do for you?" he asked, rising.

"Nothing, thank you—"

She stood staring vaguely into space as Blackmar bowed himself out. He dismissed, at once, all idea of her suspicion of the part he had really played in the tragedy. It was just as well that she had refused. He would change his plans to the safe and sure method of an organized cry for revenge through the party machine. His nomination for Governor by the Executive Committee was a foregone conclusion. He had no rival in sight. He had the Committee under his thumb. The one trick he had missed in Claudia's veto of the state funeral was the opportunity to appeal to the growing opposition to the Klan and thus divide his enemies. He was keenly aware of his weakness as a Radical candidate for Governor. His position was too well known. And yet he could not believe that this murder would leave the ranks of the opposition united against him. Its effects would be too ominous. When men came to the polls to vote, they must feel that a return to law and order and sanity was the only thing conceivable. They must vote to destroy this secret order, that had now usurped the state's power of life and death over the individual.

The more he thought it over, the more clearly he could see that the blow he had struck his enemy under cover of the Black Hood was a master stroke. In the welter of suspicion, accusation and counter accusation, he would be the last man to be accused.

He lifted his lionlike head and breathed deeply as he paused at the gate to look back at the solemn white pillars, gleaming through the cedars. His full plan of campaign was determined in a moment and executed without delay.

He had not miscalculated the general effects of the murder. A sensation was the result, both in the state and the nation. The northern newspapers held the Klan responsible for the crime. Congress was in session. A bill was introduced in both houses outlawing the Klan. The Attorney-General promptly offered a reward for the conviction of the murderer.

The only effect of this offer was to suspend Klan activities for the moment. The leaders of the new order at once became loud in denunciation of the deed. They offered their services to the authorities. Wilkes and Anderson were the first to volunteer as aides to the Federal Government. Their zeal impressed the Attorney-General. There was the ring of sincerity in their accusation of the murderer. They did not hesitate to point to Craig as the only possible author of the crime. Every track on which the detectives started led back to this conclusion. Anderson and Wilkes saw to it that the conclusion was inevitable. Craig's hatred of the Judge had amounted to a mania. The language of his denunciation in the complaint which he had filed in court was public property. His triumphant nomination for Governor in the face of this arraignment had left the way of personal attack the only resource of his enemy. So Wilkes had argued.

Rumors of the attempt to fasten the crime on Craig were not long in reaching the young lawyer's ears. His indignation was fierce He saw at once the danger of his position and his helplessness. Circumstances were against him. His association with the old Klan activities were too widely known to make a denial of Klan membership of any value had he wished to make one. He did not. Nothing was further from his mind than an effort to deny the part he had played in the overthrow of the corrupt tyranny of Reconstruction. It was a record of which

he was proud. It would stand the test of time. It was history. And he had helped to make it.

The thing that cut him deepest in this unjust accusation was its sure effect on the mind of the girl he loved. This would settle it for all time. She was now beyond his reach. Wilkes, the scheming liar, would take advantage of the situation to renew his suit and the chances were he would win. In her loneliness and despair over the foolish part she had played in the tragedy, he would give her the consolation her heart craved. He was present that night. She was dancing with him when the blow was struck. He had called the doctor. He was first to offer her sympathy and love. As now he was first in circulating the lie that accused him of the murder.

Craig wished a hundred times he had overcome his scruples and gone straight to Claudia the morning after the murder and offered his services as her attorney in prosecuting the case. His personal plea might have convinced her of his sincerity and his innocence. And yet he could not do it. Her bitterness the day before, in repulsing his effort to stop the ball, and her personal resentment of his interference, rankled in his heart. She had been cruelly unjust. And yet her resentment was reasonable,

He saw this so clearly that he wrote her a brief note and offered his services. She did not reply. Her silence cut him deeper than her bitterness the day he had called. He did not know, at the time, that Wilkes had already accused him of the murder and was using all his eloquence to persuade her to swear out a warrant for his arrest.

It was not until the rumors of these direct accusations reached his ears that he determined to act. It might be too late but no such slander could go unchallenged before the woman he loved.

An hour after he heard the rumor, he lifted the old brass knocker on Claudia's door. Aunt Laura's face was grave but friendly. She lost no time in defining her position.

"Come right in, Marse John, honey. You know what I done tell 'em 'bout dis murder. De Lawd nebber made a Craig dat would stoop ter dat—"

Craig bowed.

'Thank you, Aunt Laura—"

"You might a kilt him in de open—a fightin' man ter man, but my ole master an' all his folks wuz gemmens, dey wuz. All dis talk 'bout you make me so mad I want ter kill somebody—dat I do—"

"Tell Miss Claudia I'd like to see her a moment—" he interrupted.

"Yessah, I spec she won't come—but I tells her, sah."

Craig, alone, looked about the familiar room in helpless anguish. Why hadn't he fought more bitterly that day to prevent the fool ball! His devil's pride had gotten the better of him at the last moment. Claudia's tones had cut him like a lash on bare flesh. At least he could have told her of his hopeless love. He could have told it with such eloquence she could not doubt his sincerity. She might have scorned him. She couldn't have doubted him.

It was too late to tell her his love now. The act would be a coward's attempt to win favor. His heart ached to tell her. He heard her soft footfall on the stairs and the blood mounted to his temples in a red wave. With an effort he gripped himself and gravely turned to meet her.

To his surprise there was no bitterness or anger in her bearing. Her greeting was friendly though distinctly formal. Suddenly the formality melted into tears. She made no effort to speak for a moment, nor did he. Her voice trembled pitifully when she said finally:

"If I had only taken your advice that day—"

She paused, looked at Craig curiously and went on: "I wonder how you knew that danger so clearly—tell me!"

Her request was so sudden that it threw him off his balance. His desire to take her in his arms had been so keen, so poignant, from the moment she had broken into tears, he had forgotten all save the great love that filled his soul. It strangled him now until she brought him to his senses by a rude repetition of her question.

"Tell me, how could you know so clearly the danger that threatened my father?"

"Why, because," he faltered, "I knew so well the character of the men who were wearing those disguises—fools—knaves—toughs—drunkards—reckless boys—"

His voice died away in a look of love. He felt the first suspicion in her heart and it crushed him. He had come to swear his innocence, to offer his life in her defense and her service. She had met him with fresh suspicions. And he loved her with a love so big and tender that it had long ago forgiven his enemy. He thought of her father now even as his own. His faults were forgotten. The strong things in his character were all he could remember. And yet his daughter was thrusting a knife into his heart with a cruel new suspicion which Wilkes had planted and fostered. The thought of it reduced him to a condition of helplessness. He was still staring at her as if dazed when she spoke in clear, cold tones:

"And why have you called this morning, may I ask?"

"Surely you must have guessed," he answered, turning away.

"To protest your innocence of my father's death, of course. You must have heard the rumors by this time.

Well, I'm curious to know what you have to say. Tell me all about it, please. I am at your service, sir—"

Her tones were so bitterly hostile it was incredible. He tried to begin and couldn't. The injustice of it all strangled him. He fought for control and finally managed to say:

"I could not believe that you would credit for a moment such stories—"

"And why not?" she sharply asked.

He looked at her in silence for a long time, rose, walked the three paces that separated them, leaned close and said slowly, with trembling earnestness:

"Because, deep down in your heart of hearts, you know that I am incapable of such a crime—"

The appeal to her intuitions was so sudden and unexpected it disconcerted her for a second. She frowned, looked out the window and turned to him coldly.

"The evidence against you is growing daily. I have as yet refused to accept it as convincing. But your failure to answer my question promptly has added to my doubts—" She paused—"Why didn't you answer me at once?"

His eyes sought hers in a tense look.

"Could you not imagine a reason for that hesitation other than my guilt?"

A faint flush suffused her neck. She glared at him with stolid antagonism.

"I could not."

Her answer came with such cold-blooded emphasis it could not be doubted. It was useless to hope that she cared for him. To this moment he had cherished in his heart the feeling that something within her had answered the call of his love. It seemed impossible that two beings so close to one another could not know the truth of a

great passion though words had never expressed it in speech. He had caught at times a look of tenderness in her eyes of which she may not have been conscious, and yet to his hungry heart it had spoken the answer of her love to his.

He could not doubt now that the tragedy of her father's death had killed this feeling, whatever its nature. The idea stunned him. He forgot the accusation of murder in the pain of this loss.

Again he tried to speak and failed. He passed his hand across his forehead in a helpless sort of way, rose abruptly and walked to the window. The day was warm even for the unusual Indian summer through which the South was passing. The perfume of flowers came in rich waves from the garden. The lawn was flooded with dazzling sunshine. His soul ached for tenderness. Every instinct of his being cried for the expression of the love that filled his heart. He felt again the overwhelming impulse to turn to Claudia and pour out the story of his passion. He gripped himself with an effort. His jaw closed suddenly and the old pride of his breed of men came to his rescue. He would crawl at no woman's feet. Least of all would he crawl before a woman who accused him of an infamous crime. A crime which he had foreseen and against which he had warned her at the risk of personal insult.

He lifted his head with firm decision and turned to meet Claudia, who had risen with a gesture of impatience. His tones were clear and formal though always friendly:

"I am sorry, Miss Claudia, if I have offended you by calling. To me this crime is a thing so infamous it seems incredible but for the passions which divide men over this Klan. I had hoped that my desire to protect you and your father from such a tragedy had been so clearly

expressed that my position could not be misunderstood. I see that I have underestimated the capacity for lying which my enemies possess. Your mind has been poisoned against me and I cannot say what I came here this morning to tell you—"

"Why not?" she sharply interrupted.

"Because you have met me with so clear an accusation of crime that I cannot speak without the loss of self-respect—"

"It is not true—" she broke in coldly—"I met you with self-accusation when I remembered your warning. I asked you how you could have foreseen such an outcome of a boys' frolic, and you stammered and halted and couldn't answer. I was forced to one conclusion. You had in some way advance knowledge of the attack on my father—"

"You believe this outrageous accusation?" he interrupted angrily.

"I had not believed it until your failure to answer my question aroused my suspicions—"

"Of what?"

"Of the power you wield in the councils of the Klan."

"May I ask," Craig said sharply, "if this suggestion of my possible power was not made to you by George Wilkes?"

"What has passed, or may pass, between Mr. Wilkes and myself I do not care to discuss with you—"

Craig interrupted her with a quick lowering of his head in agreement and a gesture of protest against further words.

"I see. Then I shall calmly await the accusation of murder from your lips—"

She threw him a quick look of surprise and he went on evenly:

"It will be necessary for you to swear out the warrant for my arrest. If you believe me guilty, it is your duty. Do not hesitate."

He bowed gravely and hurried to the door.

Claudia watched him go in a stupor of pain and uncertainty.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WOMAN

CLAUDIA had waked from the stupor of sorrow and rage over her father's death to find herself no longer a wilful child. She had suddenly grown into the tragic figure of a woman. A woman with a purpose in life. She had never paused to analyze her feelings toward Craig. At first they were frankly the southern girl's admiration for the heroic figure of war. The stories of his exploits on the battlefield she had heard in school and had boasted of her right to claim him as her townsman. She had been charmed by his serious, manly face, his manners and his winning personality, at their first meeting. The antagonism over her father's political career was half real, half pretense. She really admired the sturdy manliness of Craig's fight on her father, and half suspected his cause righteous.

As she watched his figure disappear through the door, tense with an angry dignity that could not be assumed, she wondered at the exhibition of weakness which she had given on meeting him. Why had she burst into tears? By what process of reasoning could she justify such an exhibition before the man she must now regard as her bitterest enemy? As she recalled her feelings, it was with a shock she realized that her impulse had been to throw herself into his arms and cry on his breast. What if she had? She shuddered at the thought.

She pulled herself together with the conclusion that her impulse was merely the reaction of overwrought nerves.

The thing that still puzzled her was the something in Craig's personality which contradicted any accusation against him. In spite of the evidence which Wilkes had heaped against him, she had been unable to believe him guilty. His hesitation in answering her question had come as a distinct shock. She realized now that she was eager for a reasonable explanation. He had blushed and stammered and hesitated. He gave for the first time a hint of guilty knowledge. Too absorbed in the mystery of the crime to think of the possibility of his love, she had completely missed the true meaning of his action. It angered her now to recall that she had been his champion in her secret heart. She had been a silly schoolgirl fool. It was time to forget folly and face realities. From to-day events would shape themselves without favor to any man suspected of guilt. She could live but for one thing now—to find and convict the man guilty of this crime.

The Attorney-General had sent word that he would call. She was ready now to give him the best that was in her. She would use her woman's wit and every power with which God had endowed her.

The knocker sounded. She wondered if Craig had returned. An Attorney-General from Washington would naturally have rung the bell. She flushed angrily and answered the door without waiting for Aunt Laura.

To her surprise she ushered in the distinguished official of the Federal Government.

"I must apologize," he began hurriedly, "for calling a little before the hour appointed, Miss Hawkins, but I am catching the train for the Capital this morning and can stay but a few moments—"

"You are leaving so soon!" Claudia exclaimed.

"I have been here long enough to reach some very definite conclusions—"

"Yes?"

"That the further pressing of this inquiry, by the methods we are using, will be more than useless. I have decided to return to Washington, recall the secret service men and leave this case in the hands of the state authorities—"

"Surely, General," she protested, "you are not saying that my father's death is an unsolvable mystery? I am sick of hearing such nonsense. A few days ago he was murdered in cold blood in this room, on the exact spot where you are now standing. It was not done by ghosts. It was not an accident. It was done by the hand of a living man. My father was in the service of his country, enforcing its laws. I have the right to demand that a powerful government find his murderer and avenge his death. It is incredible that the coward who did this crime cannot be caught and punished—"

"On the other hand, my dear child," said the General, "I assure you that the taking of this criminal is one of the most difficult tasks ever given the Department of Justice."

"And why, pray?"

"Because in this climate the Invisible Empire is stronger than the visible—"

"You believe that the Klan committed the deed?" she asked.

"As sure of it as that I live. If we were dealing with the ordinary criminal, it would be easy. We are dealing with larger problems. Every clew we have found has proved false for this reason. The man really responsible stands at our elbow, did we but know the truth."

"What do you mean?" Claudia asked with sudden eagerness.

"That your father's death was ordered by an inner circle of the Klan. He was probably executed by an individual who did not even know his name. The occasion of the masquerade ball was utilized for the purpose. Unless we know the name of the Chief of the Klan in this state no progress can be made. This man has the power of life and death over his men. No such deed could have been committed by the Klan without his order."

"And you are going to give up the search?"

"For the present, yes. It is a waste of time."

"You have formed no idea as to who this Chief may be?" asked the big brown eyes, flashing with purpose.

"I haven't a scrap of evidence that can be used in an English-speaking court of justice—but I am morally certain that I know the man."

"And you suspect?"

"John Craig!"

Claudia's fingers tightened in a determined effort at control. She had expected the answer and yet, coming from the Attorney-General with such assured emphasis, it had shocked her.

"And you will turn the case over to the state authorities?" she faltered.

"It is the only thing I can do," he confessed. "If conditions change, I may be of help to you. At present you can make better progress without me. By all means confer with the new District Attorney when he is elected. There can be but one result possible in this district. Mr. Wilkes' nomination is equivalent to his election.

"And I should place the whole case in his hands?" she queried dully.

"By all means."

Claudia's eyes were turned toward the sunlit lawn in a moment's pause before she murmured:

"Thank you."

The Attorney-General hurriedly bade her good-by, and left her gazing moodily at his retreating figure.

She turned into the house, called Maggie and sent her with a note summoning Wilkes.

Wilkes read the message with shining eyes. Its language was so intimate there could be but one interpretation. She had in this indirect way given him full permission to renew his suit.

He changed his clothes and dressed with care, humming an old love song. Things were coming his way at last. He walked with a quick, swinging stride that soon brought him to the door. He rang the bell and passed in quickly, with barely a nod to Aunt Laura.

"Miss Claudia say make yo'se'f at home, she be down in er minute," the servant murmured.

"All right," he answered briskly.

He wondered what was keeping her when she had herself sent him the summons to call. His vanity quickened at sight of her. She, too, had dressed with care. For the first time in her life she had shown a desire to please him. He smiled at the fair vision. A single deep rose was set in her dark hair. Her arms were bare, starting with tiny wrists and swelling into voluptuous splendor above the dimpled elbows. Her dress was of black silk. She refused to wear conventional mourning. She held her father's death an act of the devil, not of God.

Wilkes gazed in a spell. She placed her hand in his with a smile and allowed him to lead her to the old davenport under the stairs and take his seat by her side.

"You meant what the intimate words of your note implied?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," was the firm answer.

"It seemed too good to be true, dear; yet I felt sure that you would need me in this crisis of your life."

"I do need you. I wonder if you will prove wanting when put to the test?"

"Try me!" he challenged.

"You are sure that you love me with a love that will endure through good and evil, through every test?"

She leaned close, her eyes searching Wilkes' soul.

His hand grasped hers with passion.

"I love you beyond the power of words to tell—I worship you!" he cried, attempting to draw her into his arms.

"Yes, I know," she answered, lifting her hands in warning, "you love me that way—I don't say it displeases me. There's something fierce and strong in you, that always drew me—that draws me to you to-night—but I want to know if your love goes deeper than the body; if it's big enough, true enough, to dare anything for the woman you love?"

"Yes!" he cried.

"Suppose I should put you to a test and you should fail?"

"With you calling me I'd dare hell!"

She took both his hands, fixed her eyes on his until their warm light enfolded him with tenderness.

"Give me the name of the Chief of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina," she whispered.

His face went white, and he stammered:

"Why—why—my dear—how—can—I? I don't know him. It's impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible to the man who loves me if I

desire it," she answered, firmly holding him with her eyes dilated under the tension of her emotion. He turned from her gaze, the cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"But, Claudia, my dear, I'm not a member of the Klan."

She dropped his hand, sprang to her feet, and looked at him a moment.

"You're a clumsy liar—"

"I swear I'm telling you the truth," he cried, attempting to regain her hand.

She turned from him with contempt. He was a greater coward than she had suspected.

"But why should you ask such a thing of me?" he stammered.

"You know why."

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"You know that this man is guilty of the murder of my father."

"If the Government of the United States with its army and navy and its millions cannot find him—am I a coward because I tell you that I do not know his name?"

"Yes."

"In God's name, why?" he pleaded.

"Becaus you *are* a member of the Klan."

"Upon my soul and honor I swear that I am not!"

"Have you either soul or honor?"

"I won't quarrel with you, dear; you are overwrought and crushed by this tragedy. You don't mean what you say."

The girl's somber eyes searched Wilkes' and he shifted his heavy body.

"You have told me again and again that John Craig was responsible for my father's death—"

"I say it again—"

"The Attorney-General has just said that only the Chief of the Klan could have ordered such an act—"

"If done by the Klan, yes."

"And yet you say you do not know who the Chief is?"

"I repeat that I do not."

"When elected District Attorney, will you place John Craig on trial for this murder?"

Wilkes' eyes flashed in a moment's hesitation and then he answered quickly:

"If you ask it."

A frown clouded her brow. She studied him with a new, puzzled look.

"You will not do your duty as an officer of the law unless by special request?"

"In this case it will be useless, unless the evidence is overwhelming—"

"Why?" she quickly demanded.

"Because the jury will be composed of Klansmen. Unless the evidence is so clear that a judge would be justified in ordering a verdict of conviction, it would be a waste of time."

"But you will place him on trial if I demand it?"

"Certainly."

"I demand it," she cried.

A smile touched the corners of Wilkes' mouth as he grasped her hand and pledged his word. He had seen in a flash the way to strike his enemy a mortal blow—even over the head of a hostile jury.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CLOAK OF CRIME

CRAIG cherished few illusions as to the outcome of the election. He awaited with grim determination the coming of Wilkes into the District Attorneyship.

He made one appeal in a public letter addressed to the voters of the district. That its effects would be much he hardly dared to hope. He felt it a duty. He did it. He boldly warned them against the folly of placing the enforcement of law in the hands of a leader of the lawless.

The weakness of his appeal lay in the fact that Wilkes' opponent was running on the Radical ticket headed by Blackmar as the candidate for Governor. He knew that the lawyer opposing Wilkes was a better man for prosecuting attorney, but he had been named by the wrong party, the party of Blackmar.

He did not mince matters in his attack on Blackmar. He asked the people to split their ticket, elect the Klan candidate for Governor, but defeat Wilkes in their own district.

Blackmar was on the stump in a whirlwind campaign for the Governorship. His eloquence drew enormous crowds. In the main these crowds were composed of as many of his enemies as his friends. On the question of racial equality he was already committed beyond retraction. He sought to break the force of white opposition to his position by frankly admitting that his principles were the expression of the true theory of democracy rather

than the announcement of a possible program of action. He conceded that as a practical question the equality of the races could not be realized for a century—until the negro had been trained for a hundred years.

His compromise was coldly received. It chilled the enthusiasm of the negroes and their radical leaders. It made no friends among the whites. It was received by them in fact, with silent contempt.

For the first time in his life of political adventure, the old soldier of fortune in this campaign struck a solid wall. He had never before realized how deep and impassible the gulf between the theory and practice of democracy. He quoted the Declaration of Independence on the equality of man until he became hoarse. His white hearers merely glanced at the dark cloud of negro voters and scowled. He was confronted by a condition that outweighed all theories.

The strength of the Klan lay precisely in this threat of the negro vote. No matter who had reorganized the order, their candidates stood for white supremacy—an issue which paralyzed all sane discussion of political issues. It was useless to proclaim a program of a hundred years of education for the negro so long as he held a ballot in his hand, and had the power to use it.

People refused to consider other questions of any importance. Thousands of thoughtful men in every quarter of the state had read the story of Hawkins' murder with a shudder. That it had been done by a man in Klan disguise was a certainty. That such crimes would be repeated if the Klan triumphed in the election was another certainty. They had their choice between a negroid government without the Klan or a white government with it. They faced the continuance of Klan terrorism with forebodings. But it was the lesser of two evils. The Klan

had forced the candidate of the Conservative party to work with them. Decent men made up their minds to hold their noses and vote the white ticket.

Only in the circuit in which Wilkes ran for District Attorney was there any defection. Craig's letter had rallied a large vote against Wilkes. It would take a landslide to carry him in.

In the final days of the campaign Blackmar realized the overwhelming tide against him. His final speeches were models of fiery eloquence. His bitterest foes gave him credit for genius as an orator and leader of a forlorn hope. Only a miracle could save him. And with flashing prophetic eye he seemed to await this miracle with an assurance that was surprising. His good spirits were unfailing. His wit, his repartee, his onslaughts on his opponent grew more and more daring and convincing to the occasional impartial hearer. The only impartial hearers, however, who ever listened, were travelers from northern states unfamiliar with the real issue behind the shouting.

But the thing which gave Blackmar his poise, the thing which drove him to the last day of the fevered campaign with spirit undaunted, was the consciousness of his safety from the clutches of the law. The cloak beneath which he concealed a cowardly murder, the murder of his Chief in his own house, was without a flaw. Its folds were ample. Its scarlet symbol had proven magic.

In his former denunciation of a secret oathbound order which used a disguise he had spoken as a theorist. Now he knew its tremendous power. He realized at last that such a disguise was an instrument by which the whole system of civilized government could be destroyed. An instrument so terrible that with it an elemental savage could work his will with impunity—in utter defiance of

law and order. The only thing required was a little skill in concealing the purchase and making of his disguise.

For five dollars he had purchased the material out of which he made, with his own hand, the two disguises with which he had slain his enemy and stolen his inheritance. The bare fact that such a secret oathbound order existed and authorized the use of a disguise in any community reduced society at once to savagery. Always beneath the skin of man sleeps the beast. Always the one restraint on this beast is the light of day in which life must be lived. The Klan had invented a cloak which guarantees darkness and invisibility. The poorest wretch in the field could find the money with which to clothe himself in this magic, and beneath its shadows work his will on friend or foe.

The immunity in which he moved was so sure, he dared to describe it with an eloquence that left his Klan hearers dazed at times. Not one of these men could dream that the hand uplifted in majestic gesture over the crowd was the cloaked force that had sent the knife into Hawkins' heart. With a smile of irony he described the depths of savage barbarism to which a community might be reduced with the continued use of such a weapon.

On the last day of his campaign he closed his final speech in a burst of eloquence which swept even his enemies into applause.

"Your Klan disguise," he cried solemnly, "is the true symbol of an Invisible Empire. Its magic lies in the terrible fact that in the name of law and order it wraps all crime in darkness. Its inventors, of necessity, must conceal their own crimes. And they cannot prevent the copying of their mystic armor. I warn you that you have loosed a force which you cannot control. I warn you that its continued use can only end in a complete relapse of human society into stark barbarism."

The Klansmen who heard him joined in the applause, smiled and hurried to their Dens to make ready for the work of the election.

The Klansmen were sure of the outcome. They figured, and figured accurately, that men vote according to their passions, their prejudices, and the density of their ignorance. Crowds do not think. They are swayed by emotions. The more primitive and savage these emotions, the more rigid the sway.

Blackmar's eloquence, uncanny and merciless in its logic, scarcely changed a vote. His ticket was overwhelmingly defeated. The Governor-elect was the man of the Klan. Anderson was elected Sheriff of the county by a substantial majority, and Wilkes pulled through as District Attorney. He had not settled in his office before he began to prepare for Craig's arrest and trial on the charge of murder.

CHAPTER XXV

A TRUE KLANSMAN

NO event in the history of the county so profoundly stirred its people as did the arrest of Craig charged with the murder of Hawkins. Instantly there were two factions. People were either for him or against him. There was no middle ground and there was no necessity for any reason for choice. The decision was a thing of passion. The Klan was a thing of passion. Those in it were for it. Those out of it were against it.

Men no longer reasoned about it. They bought guns and got ready for action. It was not a thing to be argued about. It was a thing to fight about. Fortunately for Wilkes' faction the warrant for Craig's arrest had been regularly sworn out by the next of kin to the dead Judge. He had persuaded Claudia that it was a duty she could not shirk. He had made it easy by arranging the preliminaries at her house. She had only to sign the affidavit. She signed it with a frown without reading its contents. The beginning of the action rested, therefore, on solid foundations. No man of either side could question the right of the girl to seek her father's murderer. But Craig's friends knew the hand that had guided Claudia from the first.

They lost no time in conveying to Wilkes their opinion of his action. It was impossible for the new District Attorney to cross the Court Square without an insult from Craig's followers. They not only insulted him with impunity, they accompanied these insults with urgent invi-

tations to fight. Wilkes went armed, and was always accompanied by two armed deputies.

Fortunately for the peace of the county, the trial opened on the first Monday in November. It proved to be the end of the long beautiful Indian summer. Rain poured in torrents for twenty-four hours and the red clay roads were cut into deep waxlike ruts. In spite of mud and slush, the streets and Square were swarming with excited men. Their clothes were mud-splashed and their horses covered with mud, but their eyes were shining. Some had come in covered wagons from the foot of the Blue Ridge—a twenty-mile journey. The men in these wagons scorned pistols. They carried rifles on their shoulders.

The rain poured in such torrents the crowds were compelled to seek shelter in the court room and the stores. And so the first day passed without bloodshed. Through the second and third days the storm continued. By the morning of the third day the roads were impassable to heavy traffic, and the crowd had perceptibly thinned.

The Sheriff stopped swearing in new deputies and devoted himself to getting better pistols and more ammunition for the men under his command. He had found difficulty in getting deputies. Men preferred to fight without orders from a superior.

Three days were consumed in the selection of the jury. There was scarcely a man in the county who had not formed an opinion of the guilt or innocence of the prisoner. It finally became necessary for both sides to waive the test and merely ask the talesman if he could honestly swear to render a verdict without fear or favor according to the evidence. No man was found who couldn't take this oath. And some of them honestly believed they could fulfill its obligations.

The decision to waive the test of an opinion as to guilt or innocence was made on the morning of the third day. The panel of talesmen had been exhausted and but one juror had been chosen. He was afterwards excused when it was found he was so deaf he didn't understand the meaning of the questions asked. In the selection of the new panel, Wilkes had determined to make a failure impossible. He sent a sealed order to Anderson to exclude from the panel every member of the old Klan, whether he had joined the reorganized order or not.

He was swinging in the big swivel chair at his desk awaiting with impatience Anderson's report before opening court. He was looking and feeling his best. He was proud of the power wielded in his new office. He was the best-dressed man in town. He assumed great dignity when insulted by his enemies and had schooled himself to maintain a stolid silence in reply to every attack. It had worked well. His tormentors discovered that it was difficult to get under the hide of a man who ignored their existence.

He glanced at the door and looked at his watch impatiently. Anderson was late. He was late on purpose. He was taking this opportunity to show that he was the Sheriff of the county. The District Attorney was scarcely prepared for the manners he assumed in his entrance ten minutes later.

The Sheriff closed the door with a bang and waved to Wilkes carelessly, as if to a deputy. The District Attorney attempted to fix him with a look of superior authority, but it made no impression. Anderson shot a stream of tobacco into the tall brass cuspidor, and carelessly sat down on the corner of the desk.

Wilkes flushed at the undue familiarity, but caught a look in Anderson's eye that made him pause and decide

to let it pass on the grounds of ignorance. He hesitated to spring the important question first. He had sent him a written order on the personnel of the new panel in order to avoid any possible argument.

Wilkes' first question was spoken casually.

"Any sign yet of an attempt to rescue Craig from jail?"

"No," Anderson answered quickly, "and there won't be."

Wilkes studied his man carefully, still puzzled as to his real mood. Again he avoided the main issue.

"You've doubled the guard?"

The Sheriff nodded.

"Sure."

So far, so good. He would come to the point and ask his next question as if this answer, also, were a foregone conclusion.

"You have ordered every old Klansman excluded from the new jury panel, as I wrote you?"

Anderson's mouth twisted into an ugly smile as he looked at the lawyer.

"Not by a damn sight—"

Wilkes leaped to his feet and the two men confronted each other. Anderson was first to speak, and his tone was even more emphatic than before.

"I don't take such orders from you, Mr. District Attorney. I was elected by the people Sheriff of this county. I was not appointed by you—"

"But I am conducting this trial, sir—"

"Trial—hell," Anderson sneered. "You don't want to try Craig. You want to murder him."

Wilkes' gaze fell under the steady stare of the Sheriff. He threw up his hands at last and changed his tone to friendly protest.

"Ah, have common sense, Anderson. Craig is our

mortal enemy. Until the Klan puts him out of the way we are going to have trouble."

"I'm not afraid of him," the Sheriff broke in.

"All right," Wilkes agreed, "we'll let it go at that. At least you will exclude every old Klansman from the court room from to-day?"

"I will not," was the quick reply. "I am an old Klansman. I joined the new for a purpose. There are a lot of men just as good as I am who didn't come into the new. They've just as much right in that courtroom as you or me."

"No, they haven't," Wilkes interrupted angrily. "They are no longer Klansmen. They have proved themselves quitters. The duty of Klansmen is to stand together against the world—"

He paused, drew close, and slipped an arm around the sturdy figure of the Sheriff.

"Anderson, you and I are *real* Klansmen. It is our duty to practice Klanishness. What we decide to be right *is* right, because we say so. The man on the outside has no rights. He had his chance to come into the circle and get protection by obedience to his superior officers. The Klan is going to run this state now. The regular forms of government will be merely the instrument we will use to enforce our orders. No man in this county has any right in this courthouse unless we see fit to give it to him. We've got the power of life and death over every man, woman and child in this county. Wake up! You're still dreaming of the old days before the Klan was organized. Then, courts and laws meant something. Now, they mean nothing except what we decide they shall mean. Can't you see this?"

The Sheriff smiled and studied the ceiling a moment before answering.

"Suppose every damn fool in the county, then, should join the Klan?"

"We won't let them!" Wilkes snapped. "There will always be enough left on the outside for the men inside to ride. You don't realize your power. Open your eyes. We are the absolute masters of this state to-day. The Governor is merely an officer of the Klan. He takes his orders from us. When we say dance, he dances. When we say sit down, he sits. The office I hold under the old laws of the state is nothing. As District Attorney I am the mere tool of the district Klan. It is my duty to execute their orders—"

Anderson lifted his hand suddenly and frowned.

"But you took an oath to obey and enforce the laws of the state!"

"Sure. But there are no laws except our decrees. We took an oath as Klansmen to stand together against the world. That oath comes first. Before every obligation of life, law, religion, friendship, even the closest ties of blood. It's your duty to execute your own father if the Klan orders it. It's my duty to answer this call and execute the Governor of the state if ordered to do it. This secret power is the mightiest weapon ever put into the hands of men. We are supreme. The high titles our officers assume is not bombast. These titles stand for realities. Shake off your old habits of thinking and wake up to your new powers. I'm your superior officer in the Klan. I want these old Klansmen kept from the court-room to-day—won't you see to it?"

Anderson stubbornly shook his head.

"Can't see it, Wilkes. Everything you say about the Klan is so, I reckon. It must be so. But I can only go as far as my light shows me. A lot o' these fellows you want to keep out of the courthouse voted for me for

Sheriff. To tell you the plain God's truth, I joined the Klan to get this office, and I'm goin' to try to hold on fer life. I'm goin' to try to give both sides a square deal. I just got a hunch that's the best thing for me, now that I'm in. It may not be best for you, but I think it is for me—so long."

The Sheriff rose from the desk and carelessly strolled from the room. Wilkes watched him in sullen rage. He began to see clearly that he must move with caution, both in the courtroom and in the safer plan of revenge through the Klan which he had foreseen when he pledged his word to Claudia.

CHAPTER XXVI

MOB RULE OR LAW?

CRAIG'S bondsmen offered the Court to be responsible for their prisoner during the trial if the Judge was willing to waive the formality of law that required him to be held in jail during the trial. The presiding Judge, a mild-mannered gentleman of the old school who had known Craig's father and had implicit confidence in his honor, was willing to accept his parole with his bondsmen's pledge if it were agreeable to the District Attorney.

Wilkes scorned the idea and demanded not only that he be kept in jail, but that a double guard of armed deputies be set around the prison to insure his safety. Craig's bondsmen surrendered their prisoner with ugly looks at the new District Attorney, and hastened to summon another guard to insure the safety of their friend.

On the morning of the fourth day, the trial really began. The jury had been impaneled, and the prosecution opened with a savage attack on Craig's character. The defendant refused to reply. A score of able lawyers offered their services to the prisoner, but he declined all and conducted his own defense with a single young lawyer to attend its details while he was in jail.

The storm had blown out the night before, and the sparkling sun brought an enormous crowd of countrymen into town. The roads were practically impassable to wagons, but they came in on horseback and on foot, streaming over every road.

The guard which the Sheriff had doubled consisted of six deputies. The guard which Logan held around the corner in a vacant lot numbered five hundred, and their ranks were growing hourly. They were a grim-looking, mud-spattered lot. They stood about in groups, scarcely uttering a word. Some wore belts with a revolver frankly planted in sight of all critics. Some wore two pistols tucked under their coats. A number carried rifles with cartridge belts bristling with ammunition.

Logan called on the prisoner. As an old friend the jailer admitted him without question. Craig talked to Logan in the most cheerful way. He joked him about his long face. The countryman took his chaff in silence, a smile playing around the corners of his mouth.

Craig watched him narrowly as he caught his gnarled hand giving an iron bar a sudden twist.

"Say," the lawyer drawled, "what the devil are you doing with that bar?"

"Nothin'—" Logan grunted.

Craig's face grew suddenly grave.

"Come here, I want to talk with you—"

Logan drew near.

"I told you that I would have no violence at this trial—"

The countryman's face was a mask as he slowly replied:

"I ain't lifted my little finger—"

"You've organized no attack on the jail?"

"No!" Logan scoffed.

"How many men in your crowd here to-day?"

"Dunno. I ain't counted 'em. I seed about a dozen men I know standin' round."

"See that they keep quiet," was the order.

"Sure. I told 'em that, early this mornin'. I'll give the word when they're to move—"

Craig smiled through the bars at his old partisan and stroked his arm.

"Well, they won't have to move. Don't worry. Wilkes can't convict me of this crime."

Logan sniffed his nose and twisted his lips and the ghost of a smile flickered around the corners of his lean mouth as he slowly drawled:

"No, they won't convict you. I'll be there when the jury comes in—"

Craig's eyes flashed in angry protest.

"I've told you I'll have no resistance to the course of the law and I mean it."

"Sure. I heared ye. They won't be no resistance at all—none whatsomever—"

Logan paused and changed his tone.

"I come up ter tell ye I've got a feller downstairs ter see you. He's a gentleman from Washington, Miss Claudia brought down ter help hang you. I been talkin' ter him some. An' I kinder like 'im. Want ter see 'im?"

"By all means. Bring him up."

A minute later a slender young fellow of twenty-three or twenty-four years of age extended his hand to Craig.

"I want to tell you frankly, Mr. Craig," he announced, "I'm a Pinkerton man, employed by the prosecution to secure evidence against you. I don't care for my job except its appeal to the spirit of adventure. I went into it very young, lured by this appeal. I've reconciled myself to its nasty work by making one principle the rule of life. I always seek the truth. And when I find the truth, stick to it, no matter who's hurt. From this angle I get a lot of excitement, a lot of fun and a lot of real satisfaction out of my work. My name is Bemis. Shall we be friends?"

"By all means," Craig laughed.

"All right, I've a favor to ask you. I've heard there's

a covered way from the family vault into the house of your father's old place?"

"There is."

"Would you mind making a rough diagram of this vault and covered way, and tell me how to enter the house through it?"

Craig took the pencil and pad, made a careful sketch and explained the way to enter.

In the meantime, Wilkes was impatiently waiting the arrival of Claudia. The trial was not going to suit him. He was in an ugly mood. But he still smiled at the thought of the plan in the back of his brain for the moment when the trial ended. He made up his mind to prepare the girl for this by a cautious word or two. She was late, as usual, and it annoyed him. Anderson had put him out of sorts.

He heard the rustle of a dress at the door and leaped to his feet. The somber black silk which she had worn since her father's murder had enhanced her beauty. She seemed three inches taller and the look of immature youth had given place to the dignity and poise of a perfect womanhood.

He turned to greet her.

"You're a little late, my dear. Sit down, please."

"Why sit down? Aren't you ready really to begin the trial to-day?"

"Ready and waiting for just this word with you before we begin."

He placed a chair and Claudia reluctantly sat down. Wilkes seated himself in his swivel chair, swung himself with a dignified gesture to the end of his desk and took up the bundle of legal documents which contained the trial material. He tapped the papers with his finger, and said confidentially:

"I have covered, in these documents, every possible legal

aspect of this case. It is complete, and Craig should be convicted without the jury leaving the box. But whether they will convict him or not is an open question, and will be until we hear their verdict. I want to warn you again that the real government is not functioning in this courthouse to-day. The real government of this state is an invisible one—"

Claudia lifted her hand with a gesture of impatience.

"I've heard you say that before. Please don't repeat it. You are here as an officer of the state to enforce its laws. I demand justice under the law. Nothing more. Nothing less."

Wilkes shrugged his shoulders and watched her closely before replying. He wondered how far he could go in unfolding his plans. He wondered how deep her resentment against Craig really went. He wondered if she believed him guilty. He doubted it. It was up to him to convince her. A conviction by a jury would settle it. Yet the closer he drew to this verdict the less sure he felt of getting it. And the longer he studied the quiet dignity of this girl's face the more uncertain he felt of her real attitude. He must move with great caution. He frowned and drummed the desk with his pencil before answering.

"Yes, of course; I know your demand is for justice only. The question is how to get it. The jury we have impaneled is composed of old and new Klansmen—"

She stopped him with a quick gesture.

"Please. I don't want to hear anything of the Klan. The word sickens me since that night. I am asking nothing of the old or the new Klan. If we are living in a civilized world, murder cannot be done with impunity by the old or new Klan. If this man is guilty that jury must say so—"

"But if they don't?"

"They *must*—if he's guilty—"

"There's a better way—"

"I'll have nothing to do with any way except the law. My father was a judge. I demand justice in the courts—and only justice."

"It may be one thing to demand it—another thing to get it. I've warned you. I'll do my level best."

Wilkes hurriedly gathered his papers and led her out of the office, through the corridor and into the Court Square. There was no entrance to the courtroom except by the stone stairway which led from the Square to the second story. Wilkes was glad of the protection Claudia would afford him in this brief journey of a dozen yards through the Square to the stairs. His two armed deputies seemed a small guard in the face of the swarming groups of excited men outside.

He led her through the crowd in silence. There were no insults offered him. Lowery was the center of a group of drinking toughs. He was busy advising them to keep their hands on a gun.

"Keep it in your pocket—not in your belt—keep your hand on the trigger and pull from the inside. That's the only way to get the drop on a man. Drop him in his tracks before he can lift his arm—"

The gang pressed close and listened eagerly. Some of them slipped their hands in their pockets in obedience to his suggestion.

Logan suddenly left a group of his men to whom he was quietly giving orders and strolled toward Lowery. He slipped into the crowd behind the leader just as he was finishing his harangue with the most important suggestion.

"And listen now," he commanded, "if this jury don't

hang him, there are plenty of limbs swinging over this Square—"

Logan suddenly pushed his way before Lowery, glared at him in silence and then spoke with sinister emphasis:

"You bet, my bully boy, there are a lot of limbs in this Square. And I've got a few men with me who know how to throw a rope—"

Lowery tried to speak and his tongue refused to move. He merely glared at the intruder and turned away. Logan gripped his arm with his left hand and swung him violently around. His right hand was in his coat pocket. The fact was not lost on the gang. They watched breathlessly.

Logan thrust his face into Lowery's and quietly remarked:

"We've met before, son—don't forget it."

The crowd within sight, fully five hundred strong, surged toward the group as they saw Anderson approach carrying a legal document in his hand.

The Sheriff gave the paper to Lowery and the tough glared at him in angry surprise.

"What'ell ye arrestin' me fur? I ain't done nothin'—"

"I'm not arrestin' you, ye damn fool. I've served a subpoena on you to go on the witness stand for the District Attorney."

"All right," he gulped. "I'll do anything for George Wilkes."

Logan slipped closer and drawled:

"And mind what ye swear—fer I'll be there, son."

Lowery sneered and remained silent. The Sheriff confronted Logan with a scowl.

"Look here, Logan, you can't intimidate a witness of this court right under the nose of the Sheriff—"

The countryman twisted his lips and never took his eye off Lowery as he spoke.

"I'm not intimidatin' him—jest tellin' him how to live long and prosper—"

Anderson took Logan by the arm and led him aside.

"Let him alone, will ye? I don't want no trouble here to-day—"

Logan glanced at his five hundred armed men standing in the background and grinned.

"I'll bet you don't—"

The two men confronted each other in a moment's tense silence and the Sheriff turned back to Lowery.

"The District Attorney wants to see you in his office."

Anderson returned to the courtroom and Logan sauntered toward a group of his men. Lowery merely nodded and resumed his talk with the gang.

Wilkes hurriedly left the courtroom after seeing that Claudia was comfortably seated beside his table. To his amazement his star witness had not appeared. Old Julius had returned from Columbia the day following his flight, having made up his mind that his place was at home. His instincts told him that flight would fasten suspicion rather than relieve it. Besides, he could not afford to let Henry have the run of the house in his absence. He had taken small interest in the political campaign. To all inquiries on the subject he had replied that the death of the Judge had ended his political career. He preferred the peace of the House of God. He devoted himself with renewed zeal to his preaching.

He had held two important conferences with Wilkes and prompted by the lawyer had agreed to swear point blank that he had seen Craig kill the Judge. That he should fail to appear on the day he might be called to the witness stand threw the District Attorney into a panic. Had

Craig used his traditional authority over a former slave and intimidated him? He couldn't believe it possible. Old Julius' association with Blackmar had been too intimate to permit a lapse to the old servility.

He sent a deputy for Julius and found him in his cabin reading the Scriptures. The Apostle was profuse in his apologies.

"De Lawd a-mussy, Mr. Wilkes, I didn't know you'd need me ter-day," he explained.

"The hell you didn't!" Wilkes stormed. "Didn't I tell you to report at my office every morning till I put you on the stand?"

"Yassah," he admitted, "but I hear dat hit take anudder day on de jury."

Wilkes lifted his hand for silence.

"Hereafter get your news from me—no one else—you understand?"

Julius nodded humbly.

"Yassah—yassah! De truf is, sah, I wuz a-talkin' to dat funny young man Mr. Bemis 'bout my big feet an' I fergit de time er day—yassah."

Wilkes seized him by the shoulder and shook him savagely.

"You were talking to Bemis about your big feet, eh?"

"Yassah," Julius gasped.

"You fool, didn't I tell you to talk to nobody?"

"Yassah, but he's on our side, sah. He tole me so—"

"Well, he's been pumping you—what for I don't know—but if you don't keep your damned mouth shut I'll put my foot into it. Do you get that?"

"To be sho, sah. To be sho. I 'pologizes, sah. I won't talk ter nobody, sah—"

Wilkes cut him short with a sudden swing of impatience as he thrust a fat finger into his face.

"You remember the story you told me you'd swear to?"

"Every word of it, sah. I'll sw'ar to every word ye tell me. You kin depend on dat, sah."

Wilkes fixed him with a look of stern command and slowly said:

"If you don't, I'll send you to the penitentiary for perjury!"

Julius smiled.

"Ye won't do dat, sah. I'll say every word ye tells me. I knows it by heart—"

"All right. Your place is in the courtroom now till I call you to the witness stand."

Julius bowed low as he made his way to the door.

"I'll be right dar, sah—"

Had he known what his wife was doing at that moment he would have failed to keep this promise. Blissfully ignorant of the trap being prepared for him by the young Yankee who had joked so freely about the size of his feet, he moved them slowly toward the stone stairway and climbed to the court room.

Henry was helping Bemis in his work at the door of the family vault. He had boldly entered the cabin at the gate, found a pair of Julius' shoes and delivered them to the Pinkerton man. He grinned as he watched him compare their measurement with a drawing which he had made. The measurement of the shoes exactly fitted the tracks which he had sketched. To make sure, he entered the vault and placed the shoe squarely in the mold. They fitted to a dot. There were other tracks there. One was Craig's. The lawyer had told him of his entrance into the house and his exit by the same way. The third track was a complete mystery. The most significant fact which he had discovered was that Julius had made one of these two fresh tracks. Craig's had been made long before.

The next thing was to identify the shoes beyond question. Henry brought Aunt Laura, who looked in amazement.

"Whar'd yer git de ole rascal's shoes?"

Henry chuckled.

"In de house, honey. I go right in dar an' fetch 'em."

Laura laughed. "You'se gettin' up a little spunk at las', ain't ye?"

Bemis interrupted the sentimental bout.

"These are your husband's shoes?"

"Sho dey is," she promptly replied.

"You'll swear to that in court?"

"Dat I will."

Bemis handed her the shoes and asked her to be ready to bring them into court when called. He hurried to his rooms. On the way he passed the jail and saw the two deputies approach the door to conduct the prisoner into court. The guard of six stood in easy positions about the building, their guns resting on the ground. He drew near to see what would happen.

Logan halted the deputies at the jail door with an inquiry spoken in the most casual tones.

"Come fer the prisoner?"

The deputies nodded and passed into the jail. The countryman lifted his arm and a hundred men moved to the jail door. Logan then took charge and sternly commanded:

"Stand back there, boys, and make way fer the prisoner!"

The men were slow to move. Logan pressed them back and whispered his orders. The guard watched the scene lazily, sure that his purpose was to keep order. As Craig appeared in the doorway between the two deputies a clear passage was open.

Logan suddenly stepped out of the crowd, drew a red bandanna handkerchief and waved it over his head. The whole mass of men who stood at some distance watching the jail moved in a single wave toward the door and enveloped the first line of men who had opened the passage. The deputies had taken a half dozen steps through these walls of men when the walls suddenly closed behind and before them.

The press was so dense that it was useless for them to try to move. In a moment they were both disarmed and the six guardsmen had lost their rifles. Craig stood in the center of a solid mass of a thousand silent men, waiting the orders of their leader.

Logan's tall figure pressed through the throng to Craig's side. He seized the young lawyer's arm and whispered:

"Quick now, the horses are just around the corner. I'll meet you at my place by the time you're there. I'll look out for the rear guard."

Craig smiled and shook his head.

"No, old boy, that's not my way."

"The hell it ain't," Logan growled. "You come with me now. You're not going to let that skunk insult you in that courthouse ag'in."

"I'm not running, I tell you," Craig protested.

"Sure, you're not," Logan agreed. "You're just ridin' out to my house to put yourself at the head of a regiment of volunteers. You're goin' to run the county—not run away from it. Come on—"

The men pressed around him eagerly.

"Come on, Chief!"

"We're with you—"

"Yes, till hell freezes over!"

"And then we'll skate over on the ice!"

There was no bluster. No cheap threats. They meant business and he knew it. A regiment of twelve hundred brave men, armed to the teeth. He could take his stand in the mountains and an army would be required to dislodge him. He smiled and lifted his hand for silence.

"I thank you, my friends, for this tribute to your commander. I see a lot of my old soldiers here to-day. It touches my heart. But you ought to know better than this, boys. Marse Robert told us at Appomattox to go home and be as good citizens as we had been soldiers. Somehow, this Klan business has made us forget.

"I've got to call you back to-day to something bigger than the idea of fighting your neighbors—something bigger than feuds and masks. Now listen to me—" He paused and pointed to the white pillars of the courthouse.

"*The orderly process of law in that courthouse is the foundation of human society. Without it we are again savages. I stand for that process of law.* In the hell of Klan passions I had almost forgotten it. In the clear light of our southern sun shining on those solemn pillars this morning I see it as never before. Stand back now and open the way for these deputies."

The last sentence was spoken in tones of final command. Logan watched him through dimmed eyes, but he made no further protest. He knew it would be a waste of words.

"Open up, boys!" he cried. "The Chief's so damned stubborn, it's no use. But you wait here till I tell you something more."

The crowd opened in silence and Craig walked slowly through between the two deputies.

Logan called his men into another conference that boded no good to the peace and dignity of the state.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TRIAL

CRAIG entered the crowded courtroom in dead silence. Logan had given his orders to the crowd outside and followed his Chief. Wilkes pretended not to notice the entrance of the prisoner. He leaned close to Claudia and whispered. The girl paid no attention to his words but fixed her eyes on Craig.

The prisoner walked with quiet dignity and nodded to friends who pressed close to the rail. Klein asked the privilege of sitting beside him to act as his messenger. The boy edged his way near and pressed his hand. Behind the District Attorney sat Lowery and Old Julius. The kindly eyes of the Judge were lifted from his calendar for a moment as he called:

"The State *vs.* John Craig—proceed, gentlemen."

Wilkes turned to Lowery and spoke sharply:

"Take the witness stand."

Lowery rose with a leer at Craig and walked with clumsy stride to the chair beside the Judge. The clerk administered the oath and told him to kiss the Book. It was the first time in his life he had ever touched a Bible. He kissed it as if afraid it would bite him.

Wilkes began with great deliberation.

"Mr. Lowery—"

He paused and a ripple of laughter ran through the room at the unusual title given the tough. Lowery crossed his legs and grinned in embarrassment. The Sheriff called:

"Order!"

The second time Wilkes did not pause too long.

"Mr. Lowery, did you pass Judge Hawkins' gate on the night of the ball at which the murder was committed?"

"Yes."

"Did you stop at the gate?"

"A right smart spell."

"What were you doing?"

"I stood there watching the bright lights in the house and the boys in the Klan rig as they went in at the door."

"Did you see any one enter the gate besides the boys in Klan costume?"

"Yes, sir. I saw Craig go in the gate. I followed him a piece till I saw him turn to the right and go down to the family graveyard in the corner."

Lowery fixed his eyes on the prisoner in a look of hate and grinned.

Wilkes waved his arm.

"That is all. Take the witness."

Craig spoke sharply without moving a muscle.

"Stand aside!"

Lowery had braced himself for sharp questions in cross-examination. He hoped to have a chance to say something insulting. He was so astonished at his curt dismissal that he sat for a moment as if dazed. The Judge finally spoke.

"That will do, sir; stand aside."

Lowery threw a stream of tobacco juice at the nearest cuspidor, slowly rose and walked back to his seat. Wilkes was not proud of his witness. He curtly told him to get out of the bar rail inclosure.

He consulted his notes with deliberation until the Judge said sharply:

"Proceed with your witnesses, sir."

The District Attorney nodded to Julius. He rose

promptly and hurried to the witness chair. Before seating himself the Apostle bowed to his Honor with unction. The Judge stared at him in surprise and said curtly:

"Sit down, sir!"

Julius bowed low and murmured:

"Yassah—yassah. To be sho, sah—to—be—sho."

When the Clerk said, "Kiss the Book," Julius kissed it three times. He sought to convey in the act his official love as an Apostle of Sanctification.

The Clerk took the Bible from him and remarked:

"I said kiss it—not eat it."

Julius looked hurt and turned to the Judge for protection. His Honor ignored the appeal. The Apostle pulled himself together with an effort. The ungodly who sat near had heard the Clerk's words and smiled audibly. It rattled the Apostle. He had hoped to make his testimony more convincing by the fervent expression of his love for the word of God. It was evident that there were many present who sat in the seat of the scornful. He withdrew into the consciousness of his holiness and calmly awaited the first question. It was so foolish and unexpected, he forgot his dignity and laughed.

Wilkes rose, drew close to the witness and asked:

"Where are you employed, Julius?"

The Apostle stared incredulously and then laughed.

"Ain't employed nowhar, sah. My wife's de cook. I don't hatter work."

Wilkes scowled as the crowd joined in the laugh. The Sheriff cried, "Order," and the silence was again intense.

The District Attorney fixed his witness with a steady stare until his eyes fell. He spoke with a touch of anger.

"Answer my questions now without any comments."

Julius bowed humbly.

"Yassah."

"Were you present at a meeting between Judge Hawkins and the prisoner some time before the night of the ball?"

"Yassah, I wuz dar de night Mr. John Craig come an' quarrel wid de Jedge—de day he disembarred him frum de cote."

"Tell us what passed between the two men on that occasion."

"Dey quarrel for 'bout er hour, sah. High words pass between 'em, back an' forth, to an' fro, sah. Mr. John Craig call him all de low-down names dat he could rake an' scrape—"

"Do you remember any of those epithets?"

Julius scratched his head thoughtfully, leaned back and finally said:

"Yassah. I heared him say 'you'se a liar, you'se a perjured scoundrel, you'se a thief.' "

Claudia's face flushed and she fixed her eyes on Craig with a steady stare. The prisoner's face was turned away. His own eyes had wandered to the wide-open doors. Over the heads of the crowd he was watching the sunlight dance through the limbs of a great oak. Apparently he had not heard old Julius' words. In reality they had cut deep into his heart. When he thought of the girl so near to whom he had given the first love of his life, he wished he could blot them forever from his memory. He felt for the first time the crushing fact that words are deeds.

Wilkes smiled in satisfaction at the point he had scored.

"All right. What else was said?"

"De Jedge order him outen de house an' den he order de Jedge ter git outen his house."

"And what did the Judge say in answer to this order?"

"He say dat he'd go when dey carried him out feet foremost an' not a minute sooner."

"And what did Mr. Craig say to that?"

"He slip right up close ter de Jedge an' say: 'You won't have ter wait long, sah!' " Julius smiled and nodded to the Judge, who scowled in response. Craig flashed a look of angry surprise at the witness. And again Claudia's face was red with indignation.

Wilkes watched the effect of the testimony on Craig with a smile of triumph. Craig was still staring at Julius in rage when Bemis pushed his way to his side and began to whisper.

Craig's anger passed and a curious smile lighted his face as he listened to the detective.

Wilkes saw the conference between the prisoner and Bemis, a detective in the employ of the state. His eyes kindled with wrath. He walked the three steps which separated them and with a quick swing seized Bemis by the arm.

"What the hell do you mean, sir," he said in a hoarse whisper, "by coming into this courtroom to confer with the prisoner. Who's paying your salary?"

"I do this work for the fun of it, my friend, not the money that's in it—"

"Get out!" Wilked ordered.

"You go to hell," Bemis growled. "I know my business."

The Judge glared at the group.

"If you don't go on with this case, sir, I'll have to appoint an assistant."

Wilkes frowned, turned back to his witness, rattled by the incident, and proceeded with his case.

"You were there on the night of this ball also, were you not?"

"Yassah, I wuz about dar most er de time. I stay out in de shadders o' de lawn an' peek in now an' den. I didn't like dem Ku Kluxers an' kinder make myse'f scarce—"

"Did you see the prisoner John Craig there that night?"

"Yassah. I see him go down ter de graveyard an' go in at de door. He carry a bundle in his hand when he go in. I spected he wuz gwine in froo de covered way frum de vault ter dance—so I slips up to de winder an' watch de little do' under de stairs—"

"That is the door that leads from the family vault into the hall?"

"Yassah. Dat's hit. Bime-bye I sees him slip froo de little do' all dress up like de boys. De Jedge wuz settin' dar a-smokin' by de table. Mr. John Craig slips up behin' him an' sticks his knife right froo de Jedge's heart —yassah, I seed it wid my own eyes—"

A murmur of excitement swept the crowd at this startling testimony. Wilkes looked at the ceiling a moment. Claudia stared at Julius in dumb amazement and the tears began to dim her eyes. She brushed them aside and sought Craig's. He did not meet her gaze.

The jury stirred nervously and looked at one another. The foreman whispered to the man beside him:

"What next?"

Logan pushed his way to Craig's side and sat down sphinxlike with both hands in his pockets. Wilkes considered the effect of the bomb he had exploded under the feet of the prisoner and decided to rest his case with its sensation. He waved his arm toward Craig and said:

"Take the witness."

Craig rose briskly and walked to the witness chair. Julius settled back uneasily and eyed the lawyer with evident fear. His young master was in no hurry to begin his questions. He knew that the longer he bored through the witness with his keen eyes in silence, the more uneasy he would grow. Julius drew his handkerchief at last and mopped his brow. Craig began with studied deliberation:

"You say, Julius, that you saw me enter the house through the little door under the stairway?"

"Dat I did."

"I was disguised?"

"Yassah."

"How could you know me if disguised?"

"I seed ye go in de vault wid de bundle er close under yer arm. I run roun' de house, peek in de winder an' see ye come froo de little do'—"

"How could you be sure it was the same man?"

"I seed ye wid my own eyes."

"The disguise was complete, covering body and face, was it not?"

"Yassah—but I seed ye all de same."

"You could see through the mask?"

"I seed ye—I don' tole ye dat!"

"Answer my question, sir!" the lawyer sternly commanded. "Could you see my face through that mask?"

Julius rolled his eyes, mopped his brow again, and faltered:

"Nasah—"

"Then how did you recognize me?"

The witness fumbled his bandanna, glared out the window and suddenly turned with a smile.

"I 'member now. Ye tuck de hood off ter scratch ye head an' I see yer face. I knowed it wuz you all de time befo' I see yer face."

Bemis whispered to the lawyer. He dropped the line of his questions and began a new one.

"Didn't you tell Mr. Bemis that you ran away from the masqueraders early in the evening?"

"Na, sah—"

"Didn't you tell him that as you left you saw me at the gate?"

"Na, sah—I nebber say no sech thing!" Julius shouted, glaring at Bemis and shaking his head.

"Didn't you tell the same gentleman that later in the evening when you came home you found me still seated on a bench on the lawn watching the house from the outside?"

"Na' sah, dad I didn't!"

"Do you know that if you swear to a lie—"

"I ain't sw'ar no lie!" Julius interrupted with religious fervor. "I'se de Lord's Sanctified One, sah. I ain't done no sin since I got Sanctification. Yassah, praise God!"

"Don't you know," repeated the lawyer, "that if you swear to a lie on that witness stand you can be sent to the penitentiary for perjury?"

"I knows dat dey ain't gwine sen' me dar—I knows dat," he answered with a grin, and his negro acquaintances in the room laughed.

The lawyer changed his line of questions.

"You say you saw me strike the death blow?"

"Yassah, I see ye wid dese very eyes."

"Were you close enough to hear what was said?"

"Yassah, I wuz right dar by de open winder."

"What did I say?"

"Des ez ye raise de knife ye say, 'I got you now, you d— black radical 'Publican!' "

"You swear that you heard me say that I killed the Judge because he was a Republican?"

"Yassah! Dat's what de Ku Kluxes kill 'em all fur, sah!"

Wilkes rose and asked for an adjournment of two hours.

When the court reassembled, as Julius took his seat in the witness chair, Aunt Laura's form suddenly appeared in the doorway with Henry. They walked inside the railing of the bar and took seats assigned to them behind

Craig. Laura handed Bemis a pair of old shoes. He measured them quickly on a diagram which he drew from his pocket and showed to Craig.

Julius watched Laura and Henry with mouth opened in wonder, rage and growing fear.

He rose and bowed to the Judge.

"I gotter ax de Cote ter perteck me, gemmens," he said faltering.

"What do you mean?" asked the Judge.

"Dat nigger, Henry, dar tryin' ter steal my wife frum me, sah!"

Henry grinned, patted Laura's hand and whispered:

"Doan min' de low-live rascal, honey!"

"Yassah, an' my wife come here tryin' ter 'timidate me, sah. She jes fetch er par er my ole shoes inter dis Cote. She's er cunjer 'oman, sah. I try ter sanctify her, but she won't stay sanctified. She got a kink er my hair las' night an' wrap it up in a piece er paper an' put it under de cotehouse do' step, an' she say dat ef I walk over dat inter dis house terday an jesterfy ag'in Marse John Craig, she fling er spell over me. She's er cunjer 'oman, sah—"

Laura leaped to her feet and shouted:

"Dat's a lie!"

Henry caught her and pulled her back into the chair, his eyes bulging in terror.

"Fer de Lawd's sake, honey, you keep still—dey kill us bofe—"

"I ain't er-skeered o' nobody. Dat low-life rascal say I'se er cunjer 'oman. I des knew a thing er two, dat's all—"

Craig shook his head and she subsided.

The Sheriff put his hand on her shoulder.

"Not another word from you now—or I'll throw you out."

"You take yer hands off me, man!" Laura shouted. "I'd like ter see yer fro me out, ye po' white trash! I'se er witness fer Marse John. You des' try ter fro me out. I'll lan' ye in de middle o' er spell er sickness—"

The Sheriff looked to Craig in mute appeal. He lifted his hand and she subsided.

"Proceed, gentlemen," the Court sternly commanded.

Craig fixed Julius with a piercing look. The witness moved nervously and rose again.

"I des gotter axe dis here cote ter pertect me, gemmens," he repeated. "I axes de Sheriff ter tak dat bunch er hair frum under dem steps fo' I say annuder word!"

"Silence, sir, and go on with your testimony," said the Judge.

Laura fanned her fat face, smiled at Claudia, and quietly slipped her hand in Henry's.

Julius dropped into his chair limp. In a sort of dazed trance he kept his eye fixed on Henry's face grinning in triumph.

The lawyer pounced on him in sudden sharp accents.

"Is this a pair of your shoes, Julius?"

"Yassah," was the listless answer.

"You wore these shoes the night the Judge was killed, didn't you?"

"Dunno, sah—"

"But they're your shoes?"

"Yassah. Dem's my ole ones. I got er new pair now."

The lawyer in threatening tones asked:

"Will you explain to this court what your shoes were doing making tracks in the soft mud of the underground passage from the family vault the night of this murder?"

Julius' jaw dropped, he drew his bandanna handkerchief and mopped his brow three times.

A hum of excitement ran over the courtroom, and an officer cried:

"Silence!"

Julius continued to mop his brow and fumble his handkerchief while he gazed at the lawyer in a helpless stupor.

"Answer my question, sir!" the tall figure thundered into his face.

"I doan' know what yer means, sah," he faltered.

"Yes, you do. There was another man with you. Who was he?"

"I dunno, sah!"

"Was he masked so that you couldn't see his face?"

Julius looked appealingly at the Judge and whispered:

"I doan' know what dey er talkin' 'bout, sah."

"Answer the questions," said the Judge.

The lawyer glared at Julius, whose shifting eyes sought Wilkes.

The lawyer pressed close to the shivering figure.

"I'll give you one more chance now to tell the truth—what were you doing in that vault and the passageway leading into the house?"

A look of utter misery swept the Apostle's face and then a sudden thought cleared it. He spoke with assurance.

"I went in dar ter fix a leak whar de water wuz seepin' froo. I wuz de only man dat know de way—yassah, praise God—"

The lawyer smiled at his ready wit and again changed the line of his inquiry.

"You were a delegate to the convention that nominated Judge Hawkins for Governor, were you not?"

Julius glanced at Wilkes for a sign. But the District Attorney made no response. He gave a straight answer.

"Yassah."

"You went there pledged to vote for the Judge, didn't you?"

"Yassah, but I change my mind—"

"You made a speech against him, didn't you?"

"I had a little fun wid him, sah—"

"And tried to stampede the convention to another man, didn't you?"

"I des had a little fun wid him, I tells ye!"

"Did the Judge take it as a joke?"

"Nasah—"

"He cursed you for it, didn't he?"

"He use er few bad words—yassah—"

"He never spoke to you after he was nominated, did he?"

"Dat he did, sah—"

"You're sure of that?"

"Yassah. I 'member 'zactly what he say—"

"What?"

"When I go ter shake hands wid him—he say ter me—'You go to hell!' "

"Did he ever speak to you after that?"

"I ain't nebber had no chance ter talk wid 'im—"

Craig suddenly thrust his face close to Julius, held him a moment with a piercing stare and thundered in his ears:

"Didn't you put on a disguise, slip through that passageway and kill Judge Hawkins?"

Julius caught the vision of a gallows in the jail yard and felt a noose tightening on his neck. He tried to speak and choked. His body slipped low in the chair and he lifted his arm as if to ward a blow. Finally his head moved slowly and he managed to breathe:

"Nasah—nasah—I nebber done it—I nebber done it—"

Craig smiled in the friendliest possible way and spoke in the old-time tones of the genial master to his servant.

"But you lied just now when you said that you saw *me* kill him—didn't you?"

"Yassah," he faltered, "I lie, sah; I fall from grace, sah. You nebber done it—all I say wuz er pack er lies—"

There was a moment's silence. The Judge glared at the witness and then a fierce roar of applause swept the court room. In vain the Sheriff yelled for order. Men leaped on each other's shoulders in a mad effort to reach Craig's side.

It was full five minutes before the deputies had pressed the crowd back from the broken railing and restored order.

Sammy Klein had been the first to reach Craig's side and seize his hand. When the tumult had died away the boy still crouched beside him, his eyes shining with tears. Craig smiled contemptuously at Wilkes and sought Claudia's eyes for the first time. She turned from him deliberately and he went back to his grilling of the Apostle. Julius looked into Craig's face with mute appeal for mercy and the lawyer smiled in a friendly way that disarmed his fears.

"Now explain to the court, Julius, what induced you to come here to-day and try to swear away the life of one of your own people?"

The witness glanced at Wilkes, hung his head and muttered:

"Dey tole me ter say dat."

"Who told you?" the lawyer shouted.

Julius again turned toward Wilkes, who fixed him with a savage scowl. The witness sank back in his chair with a groan. To his immense relief the lawyer did not press him again, but merely said:

"Stand aside, Julius."

The crestfallen witness looked first at Wilkes and then at Craig for mercy. Craig smiled. Wilkes sneered.

"Go to hell!"

The forlorn figure wagged his head in despair, pulled himself to his feet, bowed low to the Judge and said:

"Jedge, I des flings myself on de ign'ance o' de cote!"

His Honor tried in vain to suppress a smile and finally laughed. The crowd roared. The Sheriff cried for order as Julius left the room, bowing humbly to all.

The District Attorney rose.

"I ask for an adjournment for twenty-four hours—"

"Motion denied," the Court promptly announced. "Proceed."

"But I can't, your Honor. The unexpected collapse of my principal witness makes it necessary to reconstruct the whole case."

"You have had ample time to prepare your case—Go on."

Wilkes threw up his hands in an angry gesture.

"The state rests."

Craig smiled.

"The defense rests."

"Gentlemen of the jury," the Judge began in brisk tones, "my charge will be brief—"

Logan suddenly rose, scowled and leaned over Craig.

"What'ell is he chargin' the jury fer—when they ain't no case?"

"A court formality," the lawyer whispered. "Sit down."

The lank countryman remained standing, his keen eyes fixed two gleaming points of light on the Judge. The Sheriff as he passed heard the click of a revolver hammer in Logan's pocket and stopped in his tracks. The crowd bent eagerly forward to catch the Judge's words. Craig watched him intently. The charge was finished in a few brief sentences. The closing words again brought the crowd to its feet:

"I therefore charge you, gentlemen, to return a verdict of not guilty. The prisoner is discharged."

With another roar of applause the crowd rushed for Craig. Logan's face relaxed and he smiled for the first time. With a sigh of relief the Sheriff moved on in a helpless effort to stem the rush.

Craig tore himself from his friends and made his way through the throng to Claudia's side.

"Surely, this is enough," he pleaded, "to show you that you have been misled by my enemies."

Without response, she turned to Wilkes.

"Take me out of here, please—"

He seized her arm, threw Craig an ugly look and pressed a way through the crowd. At the door he bent low and whispered:

"To my office—I've something big to tell you now—"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SNARE

WILKES pressed his way through a mob of excited men at the foot of the stone stairway and reached the corridor of the first story without insult. Claudia's flushed face held Craig's partisans in check.

From the window of the District Attorney's office on the ground floor she watched the triumph of the man whom she had put on trial for his life. The crowd seized Craig and carried him down the stairway and out into the Square. They placed a box beneath an oak close to Wilkes' window and forced him to make a speech. Claudia watched the swaying crowd of his followers as they surged about the improvised speaker's stand. She saw the expression of indifference on Craig's face first with anger, then wonder and at last half admiration. There must be something of unusual power in a man who could inspire such faith and enthusiasm in these rough men. And then the thought of a secret oathbound order of disguised assassins who would do his bidding without question brought the flame of anger again to her cheeks.

She listened intently. He was speaking. His voice came through the closed window with peculiarly clear emphasis. He spoke with deliberation.

Wilkes called her twice. She paid no attention and he pretended to devote himself to his legal papers.

She heard the speaker's final sentence with a puzzled frown.

"And so you see, my friends, there can be no excuse for lawlessness either open or disguised, while our courts of justice are organized and performing their proper work—"

He waved his hand in a friendly gesture. The crowd broke into a wild cheer. Logan, with another follower, seized him and the two carried their Chief in triumph through the shouting, cheering throng.

Claudia turned back into the room with a puzzled look in her brown eyes. Wilkes looked up from his writing.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I can't understand it," she admitted.

He rose and placed a chair beside his desk.

"Sit down, please. I've something of the gravest importance to tell you now." She took the proffered chair and sat down listlessly. Her mind was not in the room. It was following the crowd of shouting, mud-spattered men. Far up the street they could be heard, still shouting, as they carried their leader to his dingy little law office.

"Now that the conquering hero has passed and the farce of a trial in court is over you should be in the mood to hear the truth. I'm going to give it to you straight from the shoulder, and then it's up to you. Are you ready to hear it?"

"Go on," she begged impatiently.

"I have told you from the beginning that the Klan is the only real government we have in this state—"

She moved uneasily and her lips trembled with protest. He lifted his hand firmly.

"Please listen. Let me tell you what I know. I'm not guessing. I know. From the moment the Klan is organized in any county, the government by legal forms ceases to exist. When it functions at all, it merely executes the

orders of the Klan. Get that fixed in your mind as the starting point in any discussion of this case. No matter if half the men, once members, have ceased to support it, the Klan, once in the saddle, rides. The men who back out are still afraid of it and dare not lift a hand to protest its decrees. The Judge who presided over this trial, for example—"

He saw a look of amazement on Claudia's face and paused.

"The Judge a member of the Klan?" she inquired incredulously.

"He was a member of the old Klan or he wouldn't be a Judge to-day. Your father was the only man on the bench not a member. This Judge may not be a member now. No matter. He knew that John Craig was once an important officer of the order. He favored him at every turn of the trial. He finally took it out of my hands, refused an adjournment and peremptorily ordered a verdict of acquittal. The hero rides out on the shoulders of his admirers and the scene ends in farce. Surely you could see this?"

"I only see," was the quick answer, "that my father's murder is unavenged—"

"And the man who ordered it," Wilkes whispered, "is acclaimed a hero—"

He paused and watched her face for a sign of approval. It remained a mask and he went on rapidly:

"The courts have failed. All right. The court incident is closed. It was a waste of time from the beginning. I foresaw this but consented to act through the courts to please you—now for business—the Klan, if appealed to, will not fail. John Craig is its Chief—"

Claudia threw him a startled look.

"You once told me you didn't know the Chief!"

"I didn't. I've made it my business since to find out. Every moment of my life has been a service of love to you since that hour. Follow me closely. I have found out the inner secrets of the Klan. No man can be executed by their orders save with the knowledge and approval of the Chief. As Chief of the Klan this man ordered your father's death, either by his direct mandate or by the approval of the sentence of a local organization—"

The girl's eyes grew dim and Wilkes eagerly pressed his advantage.

"The night your father was murdered you pledged your life to find his murderer and bring him to justice. I want you to recall the picture we both saw in that alcove under the stairs—"

He stopped abruptly, as he saw the look of pensive sorrow overspread her face as she lived its tragic moments again with poignant reality.

"I can yet hear your voice," Wilkes went on, "pleading for his forgiveness—begging him to speak, begging him to live that you might prove your love—"

She shook off the vision with a sob, covered her eyes, and asked for silence.

"Please—I can't endure it—"

"But you will *prove* your love for your father if I show you the way?"

Her mouth tightened.

"I'll do anything within reason to bring my father's murderer to justice!"

Wilkes seized her hand and pressed it eagerly.

"That's the way to talk. Now you're the daughter of a fearless leader of the people—"

Claudia cut his speech short.

"Tell me quickly what you want me to do."

"It's easy. John Craig loves you—"

The shock of the announcement trembled through her body. Her eyes widened and she turned away. She had thought of this possibility, though she had never heard it expressed in words. She was surprised at its effect on her nerves. She stared at the lawyer a moment, as if unable to connect the idea with the business in hand.

"I want," Wilkes whispered, "his personal confession that he is Chief of the Klan. My knowledge is second-handed, though you can rely on it. The moment he tells an important secret of the Klan to an outsider, automatically he becomes a Klan outlaw. His life is forfeited and his own men will arraign and try him on any charge preferred against him—"

"He might die for telling a Klan secret to the woman he loves?"

"Yes."

A queer look stole into her face and covered her eyes in a mist.

"A wonderful love that would be—if he did it—" she murmured.

Wilkes did not catch the low words and eagerly went on:

"It's up to you now to prove your love. Inside the Klan is the only way. Get Craig to Inwood. It's the Klan's meeting place. Once there and under your influence he is sure to talk. If he doesn't, it's your business to ask him. Unless I've mistaken my man he'll answer any question you put. Will you do it?"

She nodded her assent.

Wilkes wrinkled his brow in a moment's puzzling and laid his hand on hers.

"After this trial you must have a reasonable excuse for seeing him. You must not only have this, you must

take him back on a footing of genuine intimacy and lead up to your task with care. Let's see—"

He paused.

"I have it. Write him a friendly note about the trial. Take the bull by the horns. Your father's estate has not been settled. Ask him to act as your attorney in closing it—"

"You think that necessary?" she interrupted.

"It's an inspiration! It will bring you together naturally. It will play into his vanity, win his confidence, and get us exactly what we want."

She reluctantly consented to his plan, went home and tried to compose the letter and failed. The whole thing seemed absurd. It was absurd. But the more she thought of it, not half so absurd as the fact of the existence of a secret oath-bound order that dared to usurp the functions of government. She lay awake until midnight pondering this fact and wakened next morning still puzzling over it.

At the breakfast table she took up the paper and saw on its front page the announcement of Craig's withdrawal of his suit against her father's estate. The news was accompanied by a brief statement which might have been written as a personal apology to her for the language he had used.

"I beg leave to say to the public in withdrawing this action that I regret the overheated language in which the original complaint was expressed."

She seized a pen and wrote him an invitation to call. She read it carefully:

"My dear Mr. Craig:

"Permit me to thank you for the manly words of retraction which you have used in this morning's paper.

Your withdrawal of this suit and the manner in which it was done removes now the only barrier to our friendship. I wish to renew it, and ask you to please accept the position of my attorney in the settlement of my father's estate. Your influence in the courts of North Carolina, your eloquence and genius will be of invaluable service to me.

"Trusting that you may honor me by answering this request in person at three o'clock this afternoon,

"Sincerely,

"CLAUDIA HAWKINS."

Craig could not believe his senses when he first read the letter. The boy had turned and gone without waiting for an answer and he sat stupefied in a whirl of conflicting emotions.

He read it again, bent and kissed her name. He had never before seen her handwriting. He studied it with curious interest. Its deep lines revealed traits of a remarkable character. It was full of long strokes of the pen with equal emphasis across, up and down. The letters were unevenly formed, showing the self-willed, imperious spirit that had refused to copy the lines set by another hand, and yet the effect was pleasing and held the eye in a continuous surprise at its curves and dashes. Through every line he felt the throb of an intense nature, which seemed to sink into whispers of emotion in the queer little twists of the pen with which each sentence ended.

His first impulse was to accept without hesitation. It was an extraordinary request, of course. Yet it had been made in a moment of reasonable reaction from the outcome of the trial. She had heard his guilt proclaimed until she believed it. She had been disgusted by the outcome. She had undergone a reversal of opinion. She be-

lieved in him now as never before. It was glorious. It would give him the courage to speak the big thing in his heart.

And then there came over him slowly another thought that upset his happiness. For him to rush from a prisoner's dock on trial for his life to her side to act as her attorney—it didn't seem sane. The thing smacked of melodrama. It looked suspicious. Could Wilkes have suggested such a thing? If so, what for? He could not be put on trial again in any court of justice. The thing puzzled him to the point of anguish.

There the invitation lay before him, apparently simple, sincere, inviting him to her side. If she had only asked him to call and hadn't made the request that he act as her attorney.

There was something raw about it from any point of view.

His final decision was a refusal. If she were absolutely sincere, then the request was the result of a violent emotional reaction. It was hardly fair to win at such a moment. He refused to take advantage of her. If there were something sinister back of it, all the more reason he should pause.

It was five minutes to three when he made up his mind to say no. He looked at his watch and hesitated. She was waiting in the old hall now to receive him. He could hear the sweet tones of her voice greeting him, her eyes, warm and tender, smiling her welcome.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead and hurriedly wrote a note:

"My dear Miss Hawkins:

I thank you for the honor you do me in the request you make. I regret that I cannot see my way clear at

present to accept the offer. I have many reasons, and I beg you to believe that they are very serious ones—otherwise I would hasten to answer in person your call.

"With sincere regrets,

"JOHN CRAIG."

Claudia received the note with mingled surprise and rage. Her rage, she found, was at herself, more than against Craig. To her amazement she discovered that she had looked forward to his coming with a curious joy. She faced this fact with a shock. The more she thought of it the more she was puzzled. She determined to make another direct appeal to Craig before resorting to subterfuges.

She wrote half a dozen letters and tore them up. They lacked simplicity. The only effective appeal to this man must disarm all suspicion of subtlety. It must be natural, sincere and ring true. She found it a difficult thing to express in cold written words one thing and mean another, and yet preserve the ring of truth and sincerity. At last she wrote a letter which seemed to be effective. She read it over and added to the paper the faintest touch of a delicate perfume, an old extract of sweet pinks, which she had used the night of their meeting. She laid it aside and waited an hour carefully to read it again. It was too important to risk a failure. Should he once suspect an ulterior purpose of any kind her plan must end in defeat. She spent an hour walking through the lawn, returned and read again the letter.

It seemed cold and artificial, and the touch of perfume obvious and vulgar. It lacked the touch of personality. She had no power to convey this in words. She must see him face to face, hold him with the charm of her eyes, and the spell of beauty.

"I must see him," she cried— "or I'll fail! If I can only touch his hand, stand by his side and look into his face, I'll win."

She stood thoughtful a moment. Suddenly her eyes lighted.

"I'll do it! I'll go to his office and ask for his services as any other client. Why not? His sign is a standing invitation to the world. How stupid of me to be wasting paper!"

In five minutes she was on the way. Her dress was a simple girlish pattern of green taffeta. A quaint bonnet of the period flaring wide and high in front, its tiny circular crown tilted, was tied with a ribbon under her chin.

She stopped before the weather-beaten sign which hung from the doorway leading up a flight of stairs to his office. Her heart fluttered in a moment of uncertainty. The plain gold letters of the sign held her with strange fascination.

JOHN CRAIG

ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR AT LAW

She had never noticed this piece of plain black iron before, and yet somehow it seemed a part of the record of her life. It moved, gently stirred by the soft breeze of a southern day, creaking on the rod from which it

hung. She turned quickly away, her heart pounding with excitement, and began to retrace her steps.

She walked a block, stopped, flushed, frowned and turned on her heels.

"I'll not be a silly coward. I'll not look back again until it's done."

This time she walked firmly up the stairs and gently knocked on his door. Craig had just finished his conference with a client. He sat brooding in silence, idly holding between his fingers the brief on which he was trying to work.

The knock on his door had not interrupted the train of his thought. He was looking through his window into the deep of the skies, and linking in fancy the mysteries of their changing hues to those which flashed from the depths of the eyes of the girl he loved.

He had mechanically answered the knock without moving and still sat wide-eyed and dreaming when the echo of a soft footfall startled him.

He turned in amazement, stared, sprang to his feet, his face flushed with excitement. Surely he was asleep—dreaming! Or had the picture in his soul suddenly stepped from the spirit into flesh and blood in answer to the yearning of his heart?

"I fear I've startled you!" she said, drawing back with a timid gesture.

"Why, why—it's you—Miss Hawkins! I hadn't dreamed of seeing you in this dingy office—"

He stammered and hesitated, and continued to gaze at her in confusion.

"May I sit down?" she asked softly.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he answered, springing for a chair. He dumped a pile of law books from it, brushed the dust from the bottom and placed it before her.

"Believe me," he went on, "I was so astonished at seeing you, I thought I must have fallen asleep. You see, it was too beautiful to be true. I thought it must be a dream."

"Well, there was nothing left but to humble myself and call on you—you refused to call on me."

"I can never tell you how sorry I was to have to write that note," he said gravely.

"I'm glad, for I refuse to take it as final. You said there were many and serious reasons why you could not act as my counsel. I've come to hear them."

"I assure you they are serious enough, Miss Hawkins. I fear it will not be possible for me to state them."

"Then I refuse to accept them," she answered with a smile.

He gazed at her, wondering if she could know what havoc her smile was playing with his resolutions.

He tried to speak and couldn't.

She continued, her voice musical, tender:

"I know that my father was your political foe, but he had the profoundest respect for your ability and your high sense of honor—"

She rose and slowly approached, her eyes blinding him with their light as she gently laid a hand on his chair.

"Mr. Craig," she appealed, "life is too short to cherish its feuds."

"Yes," he answered in a whisper barely audible.

"I am alone and distressed over affairs which I do not understand. I need your help and advice. Will you refuse me what you would grant without question to a stranger who would call at this office and ask?"

Craig flushed and fumbled his hands nervously.

"Come, you will accept, will you not?" She extended her hand. "Shall we be friends?"

He trembled for a moment and his own hand resistlessly sought hers.

"Yes!" he agreed with deep emotion.

"You will come to-morrow morning to the house and go over the papers with me?"

"To-morrow afternoon," he replied. "I have an engagement for the morning."

"Then to-morrow afternoon," she said with a smile that lingered as a caress long after she had passed from the door.

CHAPTER XXIX

CLAUDIA WINS

CRAIG lost no time in beginning his work. Now that he had undertaken it he threw reservations to the wind. He would prove his worth as a lawyer and he would make his appeal as a lover resistless.

At the appointed hour the next day he hurried to the house.

Claudia had piled, on the oblong oak table in the library, the letters and legal documents relating to her father's estate. She had determined to treat Craig's first visit as a purely busines one, and make her approach to him by the more subtle way of dependence on his help and advice.

She wore on purpose the same simple green taffeta in which she had called at his office. Each step in her plans must be taken with care. He had masked his feelings with an iron will and she could as yet form no accurate idea of the impression she had made.

Seated beside the table, idly turning the papers, she waited his coming, every faculty keyed to the highest pitch.

The brass knocker struck three sharp strokes. With a quick movement she smoothed her dress and as the young lawyer entered, rose and greeted him with a smile.

"I must thank you again for undertaking this work for me," she said, taking his hand. "It is a relief to feel that it is now in the hands of one whom I can trust implicitly."

"I hope I can really serve you," he answered gravely.

"I have the papers here ready for you."

"Pardon me if I look about the room a moment," Craig said with emotion. "You see I haven't been in this room before for years. I spent many happy hours in it in the old days."

"I hope that it will not be the last time you will enter, now that we are friends. When we have time you must take me through every nook and corner of the old house —show me all the secret closets and the covered passage-way and tell me its history."

"Yes, of course—" he answered with an absent look.

"I don't believe you were listening to what I said at all!" she exclaimed. "A penny for your real thoughts—"

"May I tell you just what I was thinking?"

"Yes."

"I was thinking," he mused with a sober smile, "what a picture you make in this old oak-paneled room. The lines of your face seem at home here as though the master who carved the figure in the mantel had seen you in a vision while he was at work."

"What a dreamer you are!" she laughed.

"And yet you are willing to trust me as a lawyer?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I must prove myself worthy, mustn't I?"

"The papers are ready," she said, bustling about the table and mixing the bundles in greater confusion with an attempt at arranging them in order.

He seated himself and began to examine them. She bent over his shoulder, saying with a light laugh:

"I'll do my best to explain them—they are all Greek to me—but you'll understand."

"I'm sure there will be no great difficulty."

He ran rapidly over the bundles and in half an hour

had made memorandums of each division of the work before him. He took up one of the packages and began its careful reading, but the writing faded. He could hear Claudia softly breathing as she bent near, her hand resting on the table. He was seized with a mad impulse to grasp it. He smiled and shaded his forehead a moment lest she see his confusion. He could endure it no longer. He must regain control of himself.

He tied the packages of papers together and rose.

"You are going so soon?" she asked.

"Yes, I'll take them down to my office. It will require several hours to go over them."

"You will come again to-morrow?" she asked.

"I'll report to you again to-morrow evening."

"I shall expect you at eight," she said, extending her hand.

He held it unconsciously for an instant, and wondered if she could feel the pounding of his heart.

He came each evening for a week and spent two hours in the library with her until every letter and paper had been thoroughly examined. In many little ways she made him feel the charm of her personality; in no way so keenly as in the long silences during which she sat near, her eyes watching him intently. He could feel their mysterious light in whatever direction he turned. In no other way could she have made so powerful an appeal to his imagination. This capacity for silent comradeship in a girl so young revealed a depth of character which he had not suspected.

The real depth of its meaning he could not dream—the moments of breathless suspense, with which she watched him slowly entering the snare she had set. Each night he felt his resolution to allow no word of love to pass his lips harder to keep. And each night she watched

with increasing excitement his approach to the brink to which she beckoned.

On the night of his final report when the work was finished, she looked at him intently and said:

"Now I'm going to hold you to your promise."

"Have I broken one?"

"Only forgotten it. You must go over the old house with me—every nook and corner. But before we start, come, you are tired, I've something for you."

She led the way into the dining room where she had prepared a dainty supper. Aunt Laura, in spotless cap and apron, stood smiling her welcome. The table was lighted with candles set in two old silver candelabra which had belonged to the Craig family more than a hundred years until they had fallen, with the house and its furnishings, into the Judge's hands.

Claudia seated herself at one end of the table, which had been shortened to its smallest size, and placed him at the other. Her position, the lights and the effects of the picture on his imagination she had planned before his arrival. She meant to win to-night.

Behind her stood the old mahogany sideboard of colonial pattern, the Craig silver flashing in the quaint gold mirror which hung above it. In the mirror her own image was reflected. The man opposite could see in the silvery picture above the sideboard the dark ringlets of hair at the back of her neck, as well as the exquisite lines of her figure.

He gazed at her in wonder. Never had he seen a picture so appealing to every sense of his being. He felt that she was born to sit at that table.

She lifted the teapot to fill his cup.

"This little feast is to celebrate the completion of our work."

"And seal our friendship, may I hope?"

"Yes," she answered in a whisper.

These soft notes of her voice thrilled. To-night for the first time she had dressed specially to receive him. He had not dreamed the picture. Her beauty stunned him.

Her dress was of zephyrlike white chiffon, cut low to show the full lines of the neck and shoulders. Around the upper part of her bare arms, where they melted into the shoulders, was drawn a scarf of lace. Where it crossed in V-shape was pinned an ivorytype miniature of her mother, painted at her own age, which looked so strikingly like the living form above, it might have been taken for a twin sister. A sash of pink circled her waist. The skirt hung in full puffy lines draped over a number of underskirts after the fashion of the period. The bottom of the skirt was finished with a border of lace on the top of which were set at intervals clusters of little pink roses wrought in silk.

Her crown of nut-brown hair was parted in the middle and drawn low on the side of the face in two waves and tied behind with a pink ribbon. The long ends were curled into four strands and thrown carelessly around her neck. Her head was circled with a tiny wreath of the living pink roses from which the silk ones had been modeled. Her whole being spoke the charm of the vitality of youth budding into perfect womanhood. Her skin flashed its tints in harmony with every mood of thought. She had as a gift sensitiveness of expression, so acute that it could be controlled by the fierce will beneath the surface. She could blush at will because her imagination was so vivid that she could direct its powers by a process of autosuggestion.

Craig felt that he could sit there forever and watch her wrist and tapering fingers lift the cup. Her eyes were

friendly to-night. They looked at him with tenderness and faith.

How could he live through the evening without telling her his love! Yet he must keep silent for a while. He felt with foreboding an approaching catastrophe which must soon overwhelm the men who had created an empire whose power they could not control. His own life was yet shadowed by this tragedy. And yet—how could he give her up?

He rose from the table at her suggestion and followed her in a spell as she lifted a silver candlestick and started to explore the house.

He found his tongue at last and told her with enthusiasm the legends of the old mansion, the association of each room, and sketched with good-humored criticism the peculiarities of his people. In the gallery of the observatory he showed her the spots from which the slightest sounds were echoed to the hall below, and explained the origin of the ghost stories which the negroes believed with such implicit faith.

She leaned over the railing and looked down into the hall at the chair in which her father had fallen the night of the dance, and a curious smile played about her lips.

"And what are you smiling at?" he asked.

Without the quiver of an eyelid, either in surprise or recognition of the fact that he had caught her in a moment off her guard, she replied:

"I was just wondering if you believe in ghosts?"

"Of course," he laughed.

"Really?"

"Yes. When Aunt Laura used to tell me about them at night in the nursery they were vivid and terrible realities."

"You've laughed away all the romances of childhood now?"

"No," he answered firmly. "I halfway believe in ghosts still, and the old dreams of beauty and love, of honor and truth, seem to me more and more the only things in human life that have value."

They had returned to the hall. She placed the candle on the table and sat down on the davenport. He followed and seated himself by her side.

Suddenly she placed her hand on his, exclaiming:

"Now, tell me—" She felt him tremble at her touch.

"What?"

"The legend of the covered way. Tell me about it—how it originated and all. Of course, I know it *is* only a legend. Such things are only found in stories."

He looked at her, with a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"*You* have ceased to believe in romance, ghosts and fairies?"

"I'll believe in them if you tell me now," she said softly.

He took her hand and lifted her from the lounge.

"Have you faith enough to follow me through the dark covered way if I find it for you?"

"Yes!" she whispered leaning toward him trustingly.

"Then I'm going to do what was never done before—personally show this secret way to one who does not answer to the name of Craig."

Her bosom rose and fell with emotion as she turned her eyes to his.

"But why not?" he continued. "The house is yours. And I'm haunted with the fancy that your spirit has lived here before."

"I have grown to love it," she said hesitatingly, "in

spite of the tragedy. It's strange. I wonder at myself for it."

He turned toward the panel in the wainscoting whose location he knew so well, paused and said:

"I'd better wait and let you change your dress. You'll soil it against the damp narrow walls."

Her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"No matter. I can't wait a minute. The mystery and romance will be worth a dress. Show me the way. I'll follow."

"All right," he answered, as he extended his hand immediately and pressed the molding behind which lay the spring. The panel flew open in her face and a rush of cool air took her breath.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed clinging to his arm. "Why, I had no idea it would open like that!"

He could feel her tremble.

"There's not the slightest danger—you need not be afraid," he said tenderly. "Wait, I'll get the candle and go before you." He took the candle from the table and entered the passageway.

"You must hold my hand," she cried.

He took her hand and carefully led her down the stairs into the basement, where the passage turned between two walls and again descended a half dozen steps to another door which led out of the house into the long straight way to the vault.

Trembling with excitement, she clung in silence as they entered the damp passage. He closed the door suddenly, the sound crashing through the narrow walls in startling echoes.

She sprang into his arms.

"Mercy—what was that?"

"Only the door," he laughed.

"It scared me nearly to death," she faltered, slowly withdrawing from his protection. She felt him tremble and his breath quicken at the touch of her flesh.

"You're sure there's no danger?" she asked.

"Not the slightest," he replied cheerily. "One more little surprise and we are out in the moonlight on the lawn."

He led her clinging to his hand along the dark way, holding the candle above her head, mad impulses of love surging through his brain.

They stopped at the stone-set door leading into the tomb, and he handed her the candle, gently disengaging his other hand. He drew the heavy door back, she stepped through and he followed.

She raised the candle high, looked about the vault and saw the coffin openings. With a sudden cry, she staggered into his arms gasping:

"Why—we're—in—the—vault!"

The candle dropped from her hand and she threw her arms around his neck. The dark head trembled against his breast in real terror. He clasped her tenderly for a moment and his lips instinctively touched her hair.

She revived as quickly as she had collapsed and murmured:

"I was about to faint—quick, let's get out!"

He led her through the iron-grilled door into the moonlit spaces of the lawn.

"What a wild experience!" she sighed. "I hope I didn't do anything very silly—did I?"

"You did just what any girl of your age might do under such conditions," he replied, gazing at her with deep seriousness. "Come, let us find a seat on the lawn and I'll tell you the story of the vault and the covered way."

He led her to the seat on which he had sunk in despair

the night he came half made with pain to watch the dancers whirl past her lighted windows.

The full southern moon wrapped the earth in a white mantle of glory. The warm night wind stirred. A katydid was singing plaintively in the tree above, and in the rose-bush near the porch a mocking bird rehearsed in a burst of joy his autumnal love song. He told her the story of Robert Craig's great love for his Huguenot grandmother and why he built the vault and secret way. She listened and furtively watched him struggling with his emotions.

Suddenly he turned, looked into her eyes and took her hand.

"After all, Miss Claudia, what else matters when life has been made glorious by love—such a love as that which has grown in my own heart for you—"

She turned away to hide the triumph with which her face was flushed.

"Don't answer me now," he rushed on. "I don't ask it. I only beg the privilege of telling you how you have lifted me from self and hate, and made life beautiful. I dare not hope that you love me yet—that you hear me is enough. That I sit by your side and tell you is all I can ask. My love is so deep and full, it is glory and strength within itself. I've feared that an impassable gulf was between us. I know now there's no gulf so wide the heart of love may not leap it. Nothing matters save that I love you, that you smile and hear me!"

"I am honored in your love," she answered gently.

"You can never know how sweet it is to hear that. I cannot tell you the joy that fills me. If you should send me from you now, I think I could laugh at death, for I have lived. To win your love is all I ask—you'll let me try?"

"Yes," said the low voice.

"Then I must go now," he said, rising and lifting her from the seat. "I've said enough to-night. I'll go before I say too much and break the spell that holds me."

On the porch he asked:

"I may come again to-morrow?"

"Yes, at eight."

He bowed and kissed the tips of her fingers.

"I may have something to say to you to-morrow," she said seriously.

"I shall count the minutes that separates us—" he whispered.

She watched the tall figure pass joyously along the white graveled walk.

"I've won—I've won, beyond the shadow of a doubt!" she cried.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TEST

CLAUDIA sat before her mirror and studied herself with a growing feeling of depression. She had not slept well. The thing that spoiled her night's rest was the sense of extraordinary happiness that lingered after Craig's departure. She had surprised herself in the act of joyfully receiving his love. She had told herself that her happiness with him was merely the thrill of the hunter in sight of game.

Yet it did not explain the glow that lingered when he had gone. It puzzled and angered her. And yet, she argued, what could be more natural? Every girl rejoices in conquest. It is the normal expression of youth and beauty come into the consciousness of power. In spite of all explanations the scene of his first mad avowal lingered and brought a smile to her lips and a flash of light to her eyes.

The feeling of reaction horribly depressed her. The warmth and tenderness of his love with its boyish extravagance of words persisted, a haunting memory. A sense of loneliness crept into her heart. She was playing a desperate game. Its possible tragedy began to be felt. She stood staring idly at the gowns she had piled on the big tester bed without being able to make a selection.

The closer she had drawn to Craig in their daily life the more impossible seemed the idea that he could have murdered her father or known of such a crime. And yet closer each day drew the net of circumstantial evidence

about him and fiercer grew her determination to demand justice.

What surprised her most of all in his character was the spirit of youth within him—youth strong, fresh, buoyant and throbbing with ideals. It was inconsistent with the idea of crime. At first she had thought him somber and morose, yet now she could not imagine him more than twenty-two. In many of his ways and moods she found him more boy than man. And she must acknowledge the truth—she had begun to think of his possible death as a criminal with a pang of regret.

She rose and studied her figure in the mirror until self and pride once more touched her lips with a little cruel smile.

He found her in an illusive mood. When he begged her to remember her parting words, the half-pledged promise of a message for which he waited, she laughed and fenced.

She allowed him to call each afternoon and evening for a week until the sense of personal intimacy and comradeship had made his will obedient to her slightest whim. It amused her to watch the growth of his powers of intuition, born of this daily life, which enabled him to anticipate her wishes. In her heart had grown a fierce joy in the tyranny she wielded over him.

Toward the end of the week he began to beg for a word of love. She promised him an answer on the evening following, and forbade his afternoon call. She knew well the effect of his longer absence. At last she was sure that the hour had come toward which she had moved with such pains, the hour of surrender and utter trust, when she had but to breathe her wish to know the guarded secrets of the Klan and they would be whispered without hesitation.

She again selected the low-cut white chiffon she wore the night he had declared his love.

Maggie's keen eyes watched her dress with unusual care. The little black maid flashed her white teeth more than once behind her back as she observed the sure art with which, by a touch here and there, her mistress managed to suggest the charms of her beauty. When the task was finished and she surveyed herself in the mirror with a look of content, Maggie laughed.

"You sho' is tryin' ter kill 'im to-night!"

"Maggie, how dare you say such a thing?"

"De Lawd a-mussy, Miss Claudy, I des mean dat you'se de purtiest thing in de worl' an' he gwine drap dead quick as he sees ye!"

"That will do, Maggie," she said severely.

"Yassum."

But in spite of her severity, the mistress smiled at the maid, and Maggie burst into a fit of laughter. When at length it subsided, she stood with worshipful eyes, gazing.

"Ef I could look lak dat, Miss Claudy, I'd let 'em bile me in ile, roast me on a red-hot stove an' peel me!"

"You are breaking the Ten Commandments, Maggie."

"Yassum, I'd bust a hundred commandments ef I could look lak you."

"I accept the compliment if I can't your morals."

"Yassum."

A flash of lightning revealed the clouds of an approaching storm.

Claudia frowned.

"It's going to storm," she said fretfully.

"Yassum, but he'll come."

The mistress laughed in spite of herself.

"I'm not worrying about his coming, Maggie."

"Nobum, you needn't worry. He swim er river ef he couldn't git here no odder way—dar he is now!"

His familiar knock echoed through the hall and the maid hastened to open the door. When Claudia stood before him he seized her hands and looked into her eyes with rapture.

"How glorious you are to-night!" he whispered.

She made no answer save the sensitive smile of triumph which lighted her face, but after a pause said:

"I meant to find a seat on the lawn to-night, but it's going to rain."

"Yes, I ran to get here first," he cried with enthusiasm. "It's raining now, but the old davenport under the stairs is cozy on a rainy night."

She looked at the panel door and hesitated.

"You're not afraid of ghosts from below, I hope?" he laughed.

"No, I've locked the iron door," she announced soberly, taking her seat by his side.

With a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a crash of thunder, the storm broke, big raindrops mixed with hail rattling furiously against the windows. She drew closer to his side and he turned his swarthy, eager face toward her.

"Now while the storm roars," he whispered, "and shuts out the world, drawing us so close that there *is* no world beyond your hand and voice—won't you tell me?"

"Do you realize what it means for a girl to say to a man, 'I love you'?" she asked slowly.

"I do," was the quick answer.

"In all its depths?"

"It means the full surrender of soul and body or it means nothing—"

"And yet you ask that I say it?"

"I know that I'm not worthy, but love always dares to claim its own. It's too much to ask, yet I dare to ask it."

"There should be no secrets between those who thus love, should there?" she asked with a far-away look as if his words had caught her spirit in their spell.

"No," he answered solemnly. "A thousand times I've longed to tell you how tender was my sympathy for you in the tragedy that threw its shadow across your life in this hall a few months ago."

"And yet you didn't," she said reproachfully, studying him keenly.

"How could I without hypocrisy! The Judge and I had been bitter enmeies. Could I tear my heart open in a moment and let the world see the secret of my love for you?"

"You loved me then?" she broke in with surprise.

"From the instant you crossed this old hall the night I met you."

"Loved me when you refused to answer my appeal in person the day I wrote you?"

"I refused, because I loved you."

She looked at him a moment with a feeling of awe. For the first time she trembled with a fear that her will to master his life was not the only force at work. The shadowy figure of Fate stood grim and silent beside her.

"The man who wins my heart," she said finally, "can hold no reservations. He too must be all mine, body and soul. He asks as much of me. I demand the same. Are you ready to place your life in my hands as I am asked to place mine in yours?"

"Without reservation," he answered.

"I must be frank with you," she said, turning her eyes appealingly on him. "Since the night I saw my father

sitting dead in that chair with those masked figures, white, silent and hideous behind me, I have had a morbid curiosity about everything connected with the Klan. I have heard that you are a member?"

He suddenly knelt and took her hand.

"On my knees before you and before God—I swear that I am innocent of any knowledge of your father's death!"

"And there shall be no secrets between us?"

"Not one. The last secret of life shall be laid bare to my wife. I only beg to-night a word of love."

"Then you must show that you trust me before I speak," she went on dreamily—"you are in reality the Chief of the Klan in North Carolina, are you not?"

His hand trembled, and a look of anguish overspread his face.

"Please don't ask me that yet?" he begged.

"You are afraid to trust me?" she asked.

"I trust you implicitly," he cried, pressing her hand, "but do not ask this now!"

"The hands of southern women must have made those costumes," she persisted. "May I not share at least one of its secrets with them?"

"Remember that conditions have changed," he urged. "The South swarms with spies. The Federal Government is straining every nerve to learn the secrets of the order. Have I the right to breathe the name of a man whose life may hang on my word?"

"I see," she murmured, rising. "The daughter of a murdered 'scalawag' judge may not be trusted as other women of the old aristocratic South—"

"Please, I beg of you—"

"You may go!" she commanded.

Craig stood for a moment blind with pain, mechanically

took his hat and passed through the door and out into the storm. He fought his way home heedless of it's fury. The hurricane without was nothing to the one that raged within. Again and again he asked himself the question why she should have demanded of him such a confession.

He had instantly resented it. Perhaps he had scented danger. And yet it was preposterous to think the girl could have desired this knowledge to be used against him. From every point of view he tested the problem of her possible design to use it and found the idea preposterous. There was but one reasonable explanation. She had found with her keen intuition the weak spot in his attitude toward her. It was true. He loved her, but he had not yet fully trusted her. She had discovered it. Had she not thus revealed the true state of her own heart? She must love him. Otherwise this keen sensitiveness to his moods would not be possible. The thought was sweet in spite of his agony over the break. After all she was right to demand his loyal faith. Should he yield to her this perilous secret? Would he thus endanger those with whom he had been associated in the task of saving the South?

While the battle raged in his soul he reached his room, removed his drenched clothes and replaced them with dry ones. He walked to his window and looked out on the spluttering street lamp across the way struggling to hold its tiny flame against the storm and wondered why he had dressed again. He should have gone to bed. And then the sense of loss and misery crushed him. He sank into a chair and watched the rain dash against the glass and stream down the sides of the window, his heart throbbing in dumb misery. The memory of her words as she ordered him from the house came crashing back in sinister echoes. Never had he seen a being so transformed by anger—eyes that a moment before had held him enrap-

tured with their tender light had flashed points of steel.

Suppose she refused to see him again? It was unthinkable. He had lived a century within the weeks since she had called him to her side. The life which had gone before was dim. Four years of war and two years of daring revolution had faded. Only love remained. And those days by her side held the full measure of life.

He undressed and went to bed, only to toss without sleep. He saw the first gray light of dawn with a sense of utter desolation. The rain had ceased an hour before. Swift flying clouds and swaying treetops heralded the coming of a clear, beautiful day. He determined to write at once and beg to see her.

In a moment his mind was on fire with his passionate plea.

As the sun rose, reflecting through scurrying clouds its scarlet and purple glory, he dressed, sat down at his table and poured out his anguish in burning words. He read it over with renewed hope. Never had he expressed himself so well. The letter was a living thing. No woman's hand could touch it without feeling this. His soul beat within it.

He added the last line of a postscript begging her to name an early hour at which he might call, and sat in dull reverie awaiting the stir of life outside. He roused himself at last, found a boy on the street and sent him to Claudia with his letter. He stood at his office door and watched him until out of sight and counted the minutes until he should reappear. He had paid him a dime on dispatching the letter and promised to double it if he came back in a hurry. Fifteen minutes later he saw the boy coming on the run, his swift bare feet in the middle of the street making the mud fly.

He gave him a quarter instead of a dime, hurried into

his office, and closed the door. He felt the weight of the letter with misgivings. It was large to have been written so quickly. Yet it was addressed with her own hand. He tore it open, and from his trembling fingers dropped his own letter with the seal unbroken.

She could have offered him no deeper insult.

He sank to his seat with a groan and sat for an hour in a stupor of wounded pride. "I won't accept such an answer!" he cried bitterly. "And I won't stand on ceremony."

He walked down the street to the gate of the driveway, hoping he might find Aunt Laura at her cottage. The door was closed and he could get no response to his knock. He looked longingly at the old house shining against the dark fresh green of the rain-soaked trees and thought with a pang of his quarrel over its possession. What did houses matter if the heart was sick? A negro's cabin would be a mansion if only her face shone from the doorway.

He felt himself drawn toward her with resistless force and before he realized what he was doing his hand was on the brass knocker.

Aunt Laura shook her head as she ushered him in.

"I wish ye hadn't come, Marse John," she said sorrowfully.

"Why not?"

"She shut herself up in de room an' won't let nobody come in. I creep up to de do' an' hear her cryin' sof' an' low. I knock an' she didn' answer. I knock erg'in an' calls her sweet names an' ax her please let me do sumfin' for her. She jump up an' stamp her foot an' say she kill me ef I doan' leave her 'lone. I'se skeered of her, honey. She ain't lak our folks. When de Old Boy's in her lak it is ter day, she talks jes lak de Judge. When she laughs

an' looks putty as an angel her voice jes' like her Ma's, low an' sweet—"

"Tell her I'm here and wish to see her," he interrupted with impatience.

Aunt Laura shook her head again.

"You better not, honey—"

"I must see her. Try."

He stood at the foot of the stairs nervously fumbling his hat while she climbed to the second floor and knocked on her door.

He listened for the answer. The key clicked in the lock and Claudia opened it wide enough to be distinctly heard.

"Tell Mr. Craig to leave the house and never enter it again!"

The door closed and the bolt flashed into its place. His face flushed, the color slowly fading as his strong jaws snapped with new determination.

He sat down beside the table, seized a sheet of paper and wrote:

"My dear Claudia:

"I ask your pardon for my lack of faith. Your pride was right. Give me another chance to prove my love. I await your answer in an agony of longing.

"JOHN CRAIG."

He folded the note and handed it to Aunt Laura.

"Give it to her the moment you see her."

He walked home with dread in his heart wondering what answer she would give.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

LAURA looked at the love message and softly laughed. She would let her fiery young mistress sleep off her anger. It would be better to give her the letter when she called her.

Besides, she wished to face the mystery of man's love on her own account. Henry was calling in a few minutes to demand her final decision. Should she take him back and trust his strength to defend her from Julius or had she better wait?

He stood in the doorway of the kitchen, his ebony face wreathed in smiles. He bowed and she laughed.

"Pears lak we gwine ter have some weather, m'am—" he remarked.

Laura smiled.

"Yassah, it's de humility dat's in de air!"

And they both laughed.

"Well," Henry began briskly. "I done make de inquiries fur an' wide an' dey ain't no doubt about hit, ole Julius has left fur parts unknown—"

"Yer sho er dat?"

"Sho!"

Henry opened his arms and sighed:

"Come on, my true love!"

Laura slowly shook her head.

"Better wait er while, man. Julius 'll come back an' beat de life out'n you—an' me too—"

Henry frowned, walked to the stove and shook the grate. His face cleared and he returned to the attack.

"Ye ain't gwine ter have me till I beat old Julius?"

"Dat I ain't," was the short answer.

He smiled confidentially.

"Den I got ter tell ye de truth—"

He put his lips close to her ear and whispered: "I done killed de ole scoundrel!"

Laura's face beamed.

"No—you don't tell me, man?"

"Des lak I tells ye—"

She stared in wonder as he went on rapidly:

"Quick ez he comes out o' de cotehouse dat day, I lay fer him along de road by de ribber. I seed him goin' down dar. I hide behin' a bush an' when he come along I jumps out an' knocks him flat—"

"Knocks him flat widout a word?" she asked incredulously.

"Nebber cheeped. Des knock him flat an' stan' over him. He wall his eyes up at me an' say: "Ye kin have ole Laura. She ain't no count nohow—"

"He say dat 'bout me?" Laura panted.

"Yassam. An' dat make me so mad I picks him up by de heels, swing him over my head an' bust him open on de ground. I didn't spec ter kill him de fust crack. But dar he lay 'fore my eyes. So I picks up de fragments and fling 'em in de ribber—"

"My, my!" Laura marveled.

"Yessam, hit's des lak I tells ye. I brush de dus' from my close, an' walk on. I meets another nigger an' knock him down des fur luck. By an' by I gets skeered o' myself, goes ter de calaboose an' axes 'em ter lock me up—"

"Well, don't dat beat ye!" Laura sighed.

"Yassam. An' nobody ain't seed de ole nigger fum

dat day ter dis an' dey ain't nebber gwine ter see him no mo—"

He smiled, opened his arms and moved toward Laura just as he saw over her shoulder the figure of Julius fill the doorway, carrying a hatchet in his right hand and a headless chicken in his left.

Julius saw his enemy, dropped the chicken and lifted the hatchet. Henry moved without delay. As Julius circled to get him, he leaped the table and plunged through the door. Laura followed and watched him run, her figure shaking with laughter.

"He ain't got no wings," she cried. "But he gits dar all de same!"

Julius handed her the chicken without comment and sternly ordered:

"Cook 'im fer me quick. I'se most starved!"

Laura glared.

"Miss Claudy say fer you ter stay out o' dis kitchen, sah!"

He deliberately sat down, rolled his eyes heavenward and said:

"De Good Book say, 'Blessed is dem dat's pussecuted fer righteousness' sake.' "

Laura made a grimace at his pious whine, but hurried to cook the chicken.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE RENDEZVOUS

WHEN Claudia read Craig's note she rose, calm, alert, her cheeks flushed with brilliant color, her eyes sparkling with courage.

She sent Maggie with a summons to Wilkes. She dressed carefully and met him half an hour later.

"He has confessed that he is Chief?" he asked eagerly.

"He will to-day," the girl answered.

"The fame of your love affair has set the town agog!" he laughed.

"Doubtless," she agreed moodily. "I've sent for you, George, to ask a few pointed questions. And I want straight answers—"

Wilkes rubbed his fat hands and smiled.

"Fire away!"

"I want the truth," she continued with increasing emphasis.

"I'll give it to you if it's within my power—"

"You haven't done it always," was the firm retort. "Who are the men on whom you rely to execute justice?"

"Members of the Klan."

"You are sure they are members?"

"Certainly."

"They will arrest and try him, dressed in the same costumes the men wore the night my father was killed?"

"Yes."

"What will they do?"

"Why, try him by his own laws, of course," Wilkes answered vaguely.

"What laws?"

"The law of the Order which forbids an officer to abuse his power by using it for personal ends as he did in the murder of the Judge."

"Why have they not tried him before?"

"He was a member of the Klan."

"And now?"

"If he betrays the Klan, he is an outlaw."

"He could be put to death for telling the secrets of the Klan to the woman he loves?"

"Yes."

"And he knows this?"

"Of course."

"A beautiful thing, a love like that, isn't it?" she cried with strange elation.

"You've said that before. From the woman's point of view, perhaps it is. From that of the man whose life he puts in peril, hardly."

"But from the woman's point of view! And judged by her standard, cowards who hedge and lie as you have done, don't measure very high beside him—do they? It would be a pity to kill a man who could dare death to please the woman he loves—wouldn't it?"

"Such a man, for example, as the one who sneaked in here disguised and struck your father dead without a chance to defend himself—" he sneered.

"Yes, that's the hideous thought!" she acknowledged.

"You are going to falter and give up?" he asked indignantly.

She ignored his question and said in even tones as though talking to herself:

"I am going to meet him at Inwood at sunset this

evening and know the truth. I'll see you to-morrow and tell you my decision."

"There can be no doubt about your decision?" he hazarded.

"I don't know. I'll be frank with you. I never expected to keep my implied promise to marry you. I never really expected to face such a choice. There are times when I like you. There's evil in me, as there is in you—cruelty, pride, selfishness—I feel our kinship. But I don't love you, and the closer I get to you the less I like you."

"You'll learn to love me. I'll wait," he broke in.

"The reason why I like you less and less," she went on, "is that I feel other forces in me that are not evil. Generous impulses and aspirations that you never aroused, have never felt and could never understand."

"Which some other man might develop," he snapped. "Well, play the baby act then, and give it all up."

"No, I've made up my mind to do justice. It's the passion of my life." Her voice trailed off into tones of brooding indecision that angered Wilkes. His sensual mouth suddenly closed with a quick decision as he rose.

"At Inwood at sunset you say?"

She nodded.

"All right. Good luck, and I'll see you to-morrow—"

He turned and hurriedly left the room as Claudia seated herself at her desk to write her answer to Craig. Two attempts she tore up. The third suited her. In the center of a sheet of paper she wrote two words:

"Come—Claudia."

When Craig received this note from the hands of her messenger, he felt before he broke the seal that it bore good news.

He tore it open with a cry of joy. He crushed the note in his hand with emotion which he could not control. He rose at length, walked to his window, opened the note again and gazed at it until he broke into a laugh, repeating the words: "Come—Claudia."

"The most wonderful letter I ever received!" he exclaimed. "The longest, the richest, the deepest."

In a moment he had forgotten fears; and the pain, blind and hideous, of the last three days was lost in a joy that lit the world.

He saddled his horse and rode to the house. Claudia caught the echo of his horse's hoofs with a shudder as he approached. She had not heard that sound on the graveled roadway since the night she listened to the echoes of the departing masqueraders as she stood beside her dead.

He held her hand for a moment.

"My heart's too full just now," he said, leaning toward her, his face radiant.

"I understand," she replied. "And I'm sure you will understand me if I change my mind a little and ask you to leave me with my thoughts this afternoon. I want to take stock of life—"

"To be here for a moment and see you smile is enough. It's been a century since I saw you—"

"I want you to meet me at Inwood at sunset. It was there at a picnic one day that my father proposed, my mother accepted him at sunset and they planned their elopement."

"May I not ride with you?" he begged.

"No, I'll await you there alone. I want to do some serious thinking—you understand?"

He bowed, smiled and left her in silence.

As the sun sank toward the rim of the hills she rode alone through the ruined gate in the edge of the woods, paused and looked at the broken marble figures which once crowned the pillars, lying beside the entrance among a mass of tangled briars. They had been pried from their places and hurled there by the bayonets of Sherman's men and had not been touched since. She shuddered at the thought of war and the hellish aftermath through which she was now passing.

The lawn which once had spread its carpet of flowers and shrubbery over wide acres had grown up in ugly broom straw and young pines, which were slowly strangling to death the more delicate forms of life. The dark fir trees, magnolia and holly, still grew in somber strength.

The towering line of the six white Corinthian pillars of the front façade of the house loomed ghostlike before her. Behind in dark background the Norwegian firs, fifty years old, marked the sky line. The setting sun cast the shadows of the trees across the fluted marble of two of the pillars, while the other four shimmered in the fading glow of the light. The ivy which had climbed in unbridled riot over one of them hung in dark festoons from the top and seemed a sinister symbol in the gathering shadows.

She approached the ruins with depressing weariness. The first impulse of her resolution of the morning had passed. Doubts began to assail her. She had ridden rapidly, her mind in a tumult of excitement. Single-handed she had mastered Craig's will and brought him to her feet. Single-handed she would decide the question of his life or death. It was a frightful responsibility. And her heart began to sink with its weight.

In spite of her resolution to mete out the sternest justice, the memory of his passionate words of love, the tenderness with which he had hovered about her, and the

trust he had shown during their last meeting began to torment her.

Had they met under fair conditions, she might have loved him. She began to see it now. His sincerity, his fiery emotions, his foolish extravagances, the old-fashioned chivalry with which he worshiped her were sweet. The generous surrender he was making, placing his life in her hands, began to glow with poetry in her imagination.

He had always possessed the faculty of drawing out the best that was in her. She had never been able to hate him as she ought. There was something contagious in the spirit which his personality seemed to radiate. She had begun to feel at home with him as with no other man she had ever met.

"I'm sorry!" she sighed, as she entered the shadows. Unconsciously she reined her horse to a stand, and was startled from her reverie by a tear rolling down her cheek and falling on her glove. "What a fool I am!" she cried in anger. "I'd better turn back now. I'm a chicken-hearted coward when put to the test. I'm scared out of my senses at the task I've undertaken—that's what's the matter—I, who have boasted my strength and shouted my triumph over a strong man's conquest."

Another tear swept her cheek. She brushed it away with an angry stroke. Her horse moved on without her urging or recognizing it, so absorbed had she become in the battle raging in her heart.

"What is love?" she mused aloud. "I wonder how it feels to love?—Love him?—nonsense—I hate the ground he walks on—the self-centered, proud, bigoted, narrow-minded fanatic! I'll avenge my father's death. Let him come to-night. I'll prove myself a woman, and do my country a service when I hand him over to justice."

Again she found herself recalling the silly extravagances of his talk.

"What was it he said one day about angels?" she mused with a smile. "Yes, I remember. Somehow I seem to remember them all—'When I stand by your side, I hear the wings of angels'—And I liked it! What a fool a woman is! And tried to convince myself that I didn't like it by adding under breath, 'the wings of the angel of death, perhaps,' only because I felt my hate grow weak under a silly compliment. Well, I'm done with his maudlin love-making. It's judgment day."

She dismounted, tied her horse, and wandered down the little crooked path to the spring where many a lover had lingered in days past. She wondered at the mad resolution of her mother, taken on this spot twenty-five years ago, that had led her to break the bonds of blood, throw to the winds every tie that bound her, and brave the scorn of her own world, for the sake of the son of a poor white man—because she loved him!

Why did people do such idiotic things? Why should a woman thus sink her soul and body in the fortunes of a man? She couldn't understand it.

"Surely this is the miracle of miracles!" she murmured. "I wonder if John Craig was crazy when he said that night on the lawn: 'If you should send me from you now, I think I could laugh at death, for I have lived!' Why do I keep thinking of the silly things he has said?—Perhaps because he may die soon!"

She sprang to her feet, clasped her hands nervously and began to cry—softly at first and then with abandonment.

"I'm heartsick and afraid!" she sobbed. "I wish I had a friend to share my secret, advise and help me—such a friend as he would be—he'd know what I ought to do—and I know what he'd say, too—that I'm proud and

cruel and selfish—that I'm doing a hideous, unnatural thing—well, I'm not. The impulse for vengeance is God's law—I know it because I feel it, deep, resistless—and I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it—I hate him."

She returned to the ruins and sat down on the steps between the white columns. The sun had just set through an ocean of filmy clouds, reflecting in rapid changes every color. She watched in breathless reverence, until the sense of loneliness again overpowered her and she sprang up exclaiming:

"I meant to explore the place before he comes—"

She descended the steps and stopped before the dark entrance. Why had she paused? The question angered her. She was afraid to go through the dark corridors—that was the disgusting truth.

She turned back to await his coming. What a foolish contradiction. She would wait for the protection of the wretch she meant to deliver to death!

She returned with angry strides to the columns, and leaned against one of their friendly sides. In the gathering twilight they seemed human and sheltering in their protection. She wished he would come. A dozen times she looked toward the gate and thought she heard the beat of his horse's hoofs in the distance.

Dusk settled into darkness and still he did not come. The moon rose and touched the tall pillars above with a magic glow of mellow light, and a whip-poor-will struck the first note of his song beneath the bush at her feet.

With a shudder she moved to the outer column and waited with increasing impatience and alarm. Why had she dared this mad task alone? For some reason she had not reckoned on being alone.

Was it possible that she had been so illogical, so utterly bereft of reason that the idea of his companionship had

filled her mind? Surely she had not been such a fool. She looked at her watch in the bright moonlight. What if he failed to come! Would she be glad or angry? The tumult of feeling had reached a point of intensity that paralyzed her powers of reasoning—she didn't know. A single sense remained, the consciousness of chilling loneliness.

With a throb of joy she caught the quick hoofbeat of his horse sweeping through the gateway in a furious gallop.

He leaped to the ground, and hurried to her side.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he cried, seizing both her hands. "An unexpected thing delayed me. I'll explain to you later. Come, I'm hungry to see your dear face in the light of the lanterns in that gloomy old room below. I've a thousand things to tell you, and life will be too short in which to tell them. I hope you've been very lonely and hungry for me to come?"

"I must confess, my heart began to fail me once or twice," she said seriously, while he felt her hand trembling.

He stooped to light a lantern, and she caught his arm.

"Wait, not yet—the moon is shining brightly—we don't need it."

"But you'll stumble on those dark stairs in the corridor."

"No matter, wait," she urged nervously; "I'll hold your arm—you know the way."

"Yes, I know the way," he laughed. "Come then, your whim is law."

He drew her hand through his arm and, picking his steps carefully, led her down through the tangled débris and along the corridor without once stumbling, the timid figure clinging to his side.

"You see, a revolutionist soon learns to find his way in the dark without a light," he said, as they emerged into the kitchen whose wide space was lighted by the moonbeams streaming through the windows.

He began in low tones to tell her the story of Inwood, its tragic fall at the touch of Sherman's army and the important rôle its ruins had played in the aftermath of war.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LITTLE COURIER

WILKES lost no time in carrying out his grim resolution. That Claudia would meet Craig at Inwood was certain. Beyond that he would not trust her whims. What she would do next, God alone knew. She couldn't guess herself.

He would act without delay and trust to luck to give him the excuse he wanted to get Craig and win his fight with Claudia. He would use force if necessary. As Chief of the new Klan his word was law. He only needed the help of the county leader to mobilize a guard strong enough to meet any attempt at interference. He remembered Logan with a scowl.

He took his seat at the desk in the District Attorney's office and called Anderson. The Sheriff answered quickly.

"You sent for me?" he asked briskly.

"Yes, sit down."

Anderson drew his chair beside the desk and Wilkes studied him closely. He had made up in part for his rude refusal to take orders from his Chief, and was anxious to be friends. He watched the District Attorney's excitement, however, with uneasiness. He knew that something of importance was on foot.

"Well, what's up?" he snapped.

Wilkes looked at him steadily before answering.

"Can you call out a picked guard of three hundred men to-night?"

"If needed, yes—but what for?"

"I've called a grand council of the Klan at Inwood to-night—"

"But what for?" Anderson repeated.

"I've a matter of the gravest importance to lay before them."

The Sheriff hesitated.

"You can't tell me exactly what it's about?"

"I couldn't discuss it before the meeting."

Anderson rose slowly and finally agreed.

"All right—what time?"

"I'd like for them to cut every approach to Inwood just after sunset and hold the line until the council adjourns."

Wilkes followed his county leader to the door and shook hands cordially. A frown suddenly clouded the Sheriff's brow, he stepped back into the room, closed the door and said slowly:

"Look here, Wilkes, you're not going to use the Klan in some personal grudge?"

"Certainly not. What put such an idea into your head?"

"Had a sort o' hunch, that's all. You see, I'm just a one-horse politician. This county's my world. I joined the Klan to get my office. It'll keep me from work the balance of my natural life if I can hold it. I'm goin' to do my damnedest to hold it. I'm not in the Klan to do any dirty work for you or any other leader—you get that?"

"Of course, old man," Wilkes assured him. "Nothing could be further from my mind than that." He held up both hands in protest.

Anderson pressed his point, holding Wilkes in a steady stare.

"I give you warning. If you get me into a fatal raid

for personal revenge, it wouldn't be good for your health—"

Wilkes laughed uneasily but hurried to reassure his leader.

"I understand your position. And I don't blame you. Your men will only be asked to guard the council, that's all—"

"Then it's a go. We'll be there, Johnny-on-the-spot, with from three to five hundred picked men."

Within an hour Anderson's messengers were riding in every direction over the county.

As Sammy Klein limped along the street he saw Lowery and a companion leap from their horses, tie them to a rack and walk rapidly down the street. He caught the hum of low excited words as they passed. He followed them. They stopped and looked back and he darted into a doorway. They moved on and he followed. At the entrance of the Klan Den they stopped again. The boy watched them from a narrow alley and saw them enter cautiously.

He ran as fast as his lame leg would carry him and peered up the boarded steps. He could hear voices above. He limped back into the street and surveyed the front of the building. The windows of the second story were solidly nailed with heavy boards on the inside. The single window in the gable was open. The sash had fallen from its decayed frame. He saw that he could push his way into the loft through this window with ease if he could reach it quickly without attracting attention. The limbs of a tree on the sidewalk overhung this gable and one big limb swayed sidewise above the window. If he could climb out on it carefully his weight would swing it to the window ledge.

He decided instantly to try it. With the agility of

a cat he climbed the tree, crawled slowly out on the limb until it bent with his weight. It was still far above the opening. He slipped out further until his body touched the gable just above the window frame. He couldn't reach the opening. There was just one chance that he could grip a smaller limb, swing straight down and scramble in.

He caught the branch and swung his little body straight down. With his right arm he caught the side of the frame and sat down on the ledge. In a moment he had scrambled into the loft.

His feat had not been seen and he was safe. The light was ample. He found no difficulty in locating a crack in the ceiling from which a small piece of plaster had fallen. There were several broken places. He lay flat on the beams and through this hole watched the meeting below.

Lowery was handing out revolvers. Wilkes drew him aside. The boy could hear every word spoken.

"I want you with twenty picked boys of your crowd for a guard immediately around Inwood. I'm going to whisper to you what I've told nobody else. I'm after John Craig to-night. You've got a score to settle with this gentleman and I think I can depend on you—"

Lowery grinned, and his ugly face twitched.

"I think you can depend on me to do my little stunt, partner."

The tough slapped his superior officer on the back. Wilkes winced at his familiarity but made no protest, turning quickly to Anderson.

"I want Lowery and his men—about twenty—for the inside guard at the ruins—"

Anderson scowled.

"Oh, it's all right," Wilkes assured. "I've just told

him. There's no more loyal Klansman in our ranks to-day. He's a rough diamond—"

"He's rough all right," the Sheriff sneered.

"Every approach to Inwood cut at dusk—with five hundred men, if you can get them," Wilkes called as he turned toward the door.

Lowery went back to his work of arming the guard.

The boy slipped from his watch, crawled back to the window and looked down. He saw Wilkes leave the building, mount a horse and ride away. He caught the lower branches of the limb, drew it down until he gripped the main arm, and climbed it hand over hand until he could slide down its heavy trunk. In a minute he was on the ground. He crossed the street and hurried to a room which Bemis had taken as an office. The Pinkerton had found the boy's talk very interesting and had cultivated him. To Sammy's vivid imagination a detective was the most wonderful man alive. It was his first ambition to be one.

In excited whispers he told Bemis of the meeting which he had witnessed. That they were giving out guns and ammunition. That they expected to attack Craig at Inwood. That there would be five hundred of them on hand mounted and armed.

"Great Scott, kid," he cried. "I'll have to take you into partnership after this. Come with me to the telegraph office."

Ten minutes later Bemis entered the office with Sammy at his elbow. He showed his badge to the operator and asked for his chair and the use of the keys for a few minutes. The operator stared at the badge which showed his rank in the Secret Service at Washington.

"I thought you were just a Pinkerton," he gasped.

"Sure, that's all," he replied. "But I do a little work for Uncle Sam on the side, when I'm resting."

Sammy smiled his admiration and looked over his shoulder while Bemis wrote his message.

"Attorney General,
"Washington, D. C.
"The regiment of troops at Greensboro here by special train immediately.

"BEMIS."

Before his fingers touched the keys, the boy whispered:

"How long before they get here?"

"Three hours or more—"

"Gee, it may be too late!"

He turned, hurried through the door and ran toward Craig's office. To his horror he saw the lawyer mounting his horse. He waved and called. It was too far. The horse and rider disappeared in a cloud of dust. Henry stood watching him with admiration.

"Where's he gone?" the boy gasped.

"Gone a-galin', son. I des help him put on his best bib and tucker."

"Where—where?" Sammy implored.

"Gone ridin' wid Miss Claudy out ter Inwood. Dat's what he tell me. An' he won't be home till late—"

In a flash the boy saw that the Klan had laid a trap for him at Inwood. There was not a moment to be lost. He would get there before they did or die trying. He knew that he would need help against these five hundred men and he knew the one man to call on.

"Where's Mr. Ben Logan's place?" he asked eagerly.

Henry pointed toward Inwood.

"He live 'bout two miles t'other side er Inwood—"

"On the same road?"

"De same road. Ye can't miss his place. Dey's er pack erbout ten hounds in de yard on de lef' han' side er de road—"

"Thank you," the boy breathed.

He limped his way in mad haste to the stable, saddled his pony, mounted and called his father. He told in quick tones the fateful meeting of the Klan, their deadly purpose toward Craig, his informing Bemis, the telegram for troops and his mission to Logan.

Old Nathan lifted his shoulders with pride.

"You're a brave lad, my son. Do your level best now. I'll stay and lead the troops to Inwood—God be with you!"

The boy touched the pony with his heels and he leaped away in a gallop. He held him in rein until he cleared the streets and struck the long stretch of county road. And then he leaned low on the sleek young neck and urged him to the top of his speed.

He set his teeth and stroked the thick mane.

"They say you're the fastest pony in the county—now show me—now—show—me!"

The pony answered the nervous cry of his little master with quick intelligence. He knew that he was being put to the test. He knew by a subtle instinct that something big and vital had gone wrong with those who loved him. Every ounce of strength in his tense young muscles answered the call to duty.

The boy saw a cross roads a quarter of a mile ahead and tried to decide the right way. He drew rein and breathed a prayer:

"God show me the way!"

The pony drew to the left and he accepted the sign in answer. Again he pressed his heels. The little horse

laid his slender ears back and only a cloud of dust marked his swift flight. As the swirling cloud flashed the turn of the road near Inwood, a Klan picket in full disguise rode into the open way and lifted his hand in a command to halt.

The boy drew in the pony to a trot and continued to approach the picket until nearly abreast as if to receive his orders. As his horse's head approached the shrouded figure, the boy suddenly swung low on his neck and dug his heel into his side. The pony leaped forward and had passed in a flash before the astonished Klansman could wheel his horse in pursuit. For a mile the race was even. And then the fresh horse of the picket began to gain. Not much, but a little. Gradually the shrouded figure got within pistol range.

He waved his arm and shouted:

"Halt!"

The only answer was a new spurt of desperate speed and the crouching still lower of the little figure wrapped in dust.

The pursuer halted, took deliberate aim and fired twice. At the second shot a spasm of pain gripped the boy's face and his right arm dropped for a minute. With a desperate effort he held the reins and urged the pony onward. He glanced to see if his pursuer was following and saw him turn back to his post.

He drew the reins and let his little foaming horse rest in the woods. He took off his coat and bound a handkerchief over the wound spurting blood from his arm. He tied it with his teeth, put his coat on, mounted and rode on again at full speed.

Two miles further his horse slowed down to a dog trot and stopped. The boy lifted his head in a dazed way and the road became blurred. With the last ounce of his

strength he pulled himself together, saw the house on the left and heard the hounds barking. He drew himself erect and called to the pony:

"Go on now, sir!"

He broke into a gallop and in a moment stood before the gate with the hounds barking their salutes.

Logan saw the foam-flecked horse and hurried to answer the summons. In quick gasps Sammy told his story. His last words were pitiful in their pleading:

"For God's sake, get some men and go to Inwood. They're going to kill Mr. Craig!"

He reeled in the saddle and would have fallen had not the strong arm of the countryman caught him. Logan lifted him to the ground, saw the blood-soaked arm and knew what had happened. He drew a flask from his pocket and pressed it to Sammy's lips. He swallowed, coughed, choked, spluttered—rallied at last and smiled faintly his thanks.

Logan patted his head.

"All right now?"

"Sure. I'm ready to ride with you," he faltered.

Logan saddled a horse and lifted the boy again into his saddle. He gave him a cup of cold water from his canteen and asked:

"Right—Sammy?"

The boy nodded.

"Good boy," Logan encouraged. "Go down that road now and ask every man you see to meet me at the blacksmith shop this side of Inwood. They're all with us. I'll go the other way. And, boy, you keep stiff in that saddle and ride like hell—we ain't got no time to lose!"

Sammy dug his heels against his pony and dashed down the road. Logan wheeled his horse in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RIDERS

TWO lines of armed horsemen were rapidly forming in the forest of Inwood and at the rendezvous appointed by Logan. Wilkes had instructed the Klan pickets to allow Craig to pass in without molestation. The well-known horse on which he rode was spotted a half mile in the distance. The picket withdrew into the bushes and he passed without suspecting the ambush.

On a slight rising ground in a little valley between two wooded hills Anderson sat his horse waiting the arrival of Wilkes. The lawyer had gone on a mysterious errand that annoyed the Sheriff. Delays in such a crisis were always dangerous.

The men were ranging themselves in a long double curved line. They were ready at the signal to gallop two abreast in any direction ordered. In groups of two, threes and fours the new arrivals, in full disguise for horse and man, dashed into the valley and took their places in line. Anderson watched the growing army of cavalry with pride mingled with uneasiness. It was a frolic he would have avoided if possible. At the last moment he would have called it off but for Wilkes' peremptory orders. The men were in high spirits. It was the first raid on which they had been called since the crash that came with Hawkins' death. A murmur of excited whispers ran along the ranks.

"What'ell's it all about?" was the eager question asked by each new group as they wheeled into position.

"Nobody knows—"

"But we're in for some fun!"

"You bet!"

Anderson looked at his watch and scowled with impatience as Wilkes galloped up accompanied by a mysterious figure who rode his horse awkwardly. The Sheriff glanced at the awkward rider and wondered if this forlorn recruit was the cause of the delay.

"Is my special guard ready?" Wilkes inquired.

"Yes. They're standing in the shadows on the right of the main line—"

"Good."

"But I'd like to know," Anderson grumbled, "what in hell they're wearing those black hoods for to-night—is it your orders?"

"Of course not," Wilkes protested. "Just a fool notion of Lowery's."

"I thought so. And I'd like to know what was fomentin' in the back of his ugly skull when he handed out those hoods—"

"Don't worry over details, Anderson," Wilkes muttered. "All you've got to do is to circle Inwood and prevent any disturbance while I conduct the council. Are you ready?"

"I've been ready forty minutes, and your delay's not to my liking—I'll tell you that—"

"All right," Wilkes ordered briskly. "Swing your men out on the main roads now. Keep your intersecting lines in hailing distance—so close that a rat can't get through. I'll do the rest."

He signaled to his companion and the two rode into the shadows on the right. In a moment he returned at the head of his squadron, twenty black-hooded riders, and rode straight for Inwood.

In the open place before the old blacksmith shop the armed vigilantes were gathering at the call of the boy. He had talked himself hoarse telling the story of the Klan meeting and his wild ride to Logan's house.

A rider pressed near and handed him one of his pistols.

"You may need it, sonny."

The boy smiled and put it in his pocket.

"Why don't Mr. Logan come?" he asked wistfully.

"He's gettin' more men. We're goin' ter need 'em from what you say," was the serious answer.

The boy's keen ears caught the roar of horses' hoofs and down the roadway a cloud of dust obscured the moon.

"They're comin'!" Sammy shouted.

He had scarcely spoken when Logan at the head of a hundred stern-visaged men drew rein before them. The leader pushed his horse beside the boy and touched his shoulder.

"You're all right, Sammy?"

"Yes, and ready to fight, too!" He showed his pistol with pride.

"Bully boy!" Logan cried.

He lifted his long arm in the moonlight and called:

"Double column—forward—and charge on Inwood!"

His spurs touched the horse's flanks and he plunged down the road followed by his two hundred men.

The squadron of twenty black hoods crept through the shadows of the trees surrounding the ruins and tied their horses to swinging limbs. They quickly gathered in an excited group. Lowery's courage had already been augmented by whisky. He lifted his bottle to take another drink when Wilkes struck it from his hands and it broke in pieces on a rock.

The tough's big fist clenched.

"Damn you!" he gasped.

Two men gripped his arm.

Wilkes faced him with the courage of desperation and threw his orders into Lowery's face.

"Not another drop of liquor here to-night. You've got my life and the lives of hundreds of men in your hands. I won't stand for it, I tell you—"

He paused and turned to the men who had crowded up.

"Any more bottles in this crowd?"

"Yes," came the timid answer.

"Hand them over to me!"

The order was received in silence. Not a man moved. Lowery glanced at the stolid mass of his black hoods and decided that as he had lost his liquor he'd as well score a point of discipline by sacrificing the others' supply. Besides, he had another bottle in his boot.

"Hand them over, boys," he growled. "I reckon it's better."

Half a dozen flasks were passed to Wilkes and he threw them into the woods. He deployed the men in a semi-circle and ordered them to crawl through the broom sedge to the ruins and lie flat until the order should be given to rush the basement.

As Logan's vigilantes rode savagely into the shadows of the forest of Inwood, they encountered Anderson's first pickets. The pickets fired, wheeled their horses and returned to their commander.

Logan halted his men and gave his final instructions for the charge.

"That means," he explained, "that we're in for a stiff fight. Somebody's in command that's got sense. The boy says Wilkes wanted five hundred raiders. He's maybe got 'em. All right. Two hundred honest men can whip a thousand such skunks — Can't we?" he yelled.

The answer was a roar of approval.

"All right now," he ordered. "A quick trot till you see the devils and then push 'em straight back into hell—come on!"

The men gripped their bridle reins in their left hands, a pistol in their right and the column moved forward in a brisk trot.

Anderson had given his orders in sharp angry tones on receiving the report of his pickets. He was in for it. There was no way out except through the ranks of those charging horsemen. He had a pretty clear idea who was leading them, too. He hadn't talked with Logan for nothing during the tense days of the trial. He knew that he had to fight now for his own life. He saw that Wilkes had led him into a trap. His first business was to get out of the trap. He'd settle with Wilkes later.

His aide galloped along the ghostlike lines and gave his orders. The white-robed horsemen in double column trotted quickly by. Anderson stood motionless until they had passed. He had given his command to the leader to receive the charge by a countercharge at the first flash of the enemy. It would be a devil's fight in the dark but there was no help for it. He would wait in the rear until the first shock of charge and counter-charge had disorganized the lines and then take personal command and drive Logan's men back in confusion.

The Klansmen galloped over a hill, down a ravine and up the grade on the other side. The long line of white-robed horses two abreast glided across the valley in the weird moonlight like a huge crawling snake. They swept up the grade without slackening the pace and from the top the leader saw Logan's men trotting across an open field. He quickly formed for a cavalry counter-charge. He knew that Logan had already caught the flash of their

robes. He could hear his sharp words of command ordering the charge.

"Hold your fire until in fifty yards' range!" he shouted.

There was a moment's silence and then two hundred dark figures in the field suddenly gave the savage rebel yell of the Confederate army—the cry of the hunter in sight of his game—and charged!

Anderson's full line of Klansmen had reached the hill crest and at the shrill call of their whistles they plunged down the incline to meet their onrushing foe. They heard Logan's savage shout:

"Fire!"

Two hundred pistol muzzles flamed in the darkness. It seemed incredible but not a man fell and not a horse stumbled. The charge was uphill. In the darkness the volley had been aimed too high and went over their heads.

The Klansmen's answering volley downhill at close range tore through Logan's ranks with deadly effect as the two columns crashed. Klansmen and vigilantes were now a snarling, swirling, cursing, flaming mass of infuriated beasts.

In the rear, Anderson heard the two quick volleys, the crash and roar of the conflict with rising wrath.

He called his aide and spoke in sharp angry tones.

"Ride to Inwood. Find George Wilkes and tell him this is his job—to come and take it—"

The white horseman wheeled and rode into the shadows.

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM THE DEEP WOODS

THE moonlit field, for ten minutes, remained a mass of yelling, fighting, snarling horsemen. The crack of revolvers was unceasing. Here and there the ground was marked by a white-robed horse and rider beside the dark heap of a fallen vigilante.

The superior numbers of the Klansmen told heavily in their favor. Anderson, in the moment of confusion following the first impact, rode into the field and took command. In a well-directed charge he drove the last group of Logan's men into the woods. On the hilltop they made a last stand and yielded inch by inch to the shock of numbers. Their dark figures on the crest, silhouetted against the moonlit clouds, fighting desperately with their white-robed assailants, made a scene of weird spectacular beauty. All pickets had been withdrawn—every available man was in the fight—and neither leader could know that a long line of polished bayonets were moving swiftly toward them down the straight road from the town. They marched, this regiment of infantry, with steady, quick, rhythmic tread. Bemis and old Nathan Klein were leading the way.

In the woods the battle of the horsemen became one of individual struggle. Men fought from tree to tree, their horses tied, or wandering loose. The vigilantes had a distinct advantage in this phase of the fight. Their dark clothes were all but invisible in the shadows. The Klan disguise was a fair target.

Logan's horse was standing in an open space and from

his stirrups he was shouting orders to his men. A masked figure on foot stole from tree to tree, slipped softly behind the leader's back, leveled his revolver point-blank at close range and fired. Before Logan could lift his pistol to return the fire his assailant had leaped into the shadows and disappeared.

The leader's head drooped. He slipped from his horse, staggered to a tree and leaned against its trunk. Sammy had seen the flash of the Klansman's revolver as he approached his commander with a message from the rear. He rushed to his side and held him up.

"Are you hurt, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Don't you mind about me, boy," Logan answered cheerfully. "I want you to get a message through to John Craig—quick now—can you?"

"I'll try—"

"Slip through the brush on foot—find him in the old house somewhere. Tell him I'm hurt but my men are coming—"

"Yes, sir," the boy answered as he brushed a tear from his cheek.

The leader lifted his head and spoke clearly:

"Pick up a disguise, you'll need it to get through—go now quick—you're a great boy—"

Anderson found to his amazement that the battle in the woods was going against him. His men were steadily giving ground and falling back toward the gates of Inwood. He sent another message to Wilkes.

His courier passed a solitary white figure crawling flat on his belly through the broom sedge toward the ruins. He paid no attention to him, supposing it to be a wounded Klansman.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TRAPPED

CRAIG paused in his story of the poetic rôle the ruins of the South had played in saving her civilization and walked quietly to the big range still intact in its brick walls.

"In this room," Claudia faltered, "the Klan's high court was held?"

"Yes," he answered.

He stooped, inserted a key in the door of the range, unlocked it and drew out a small iron box. He held it up before her.

"I was delayed to-night finding the key to this box. I am the only man in the state now who knows where it is kept. It contains the signs, passwords and ritual of the original Klan. I imperil no life save my own in telling you this."

She was trembling violently as she murmured:

"You *are* the Chief of the Klan?"

He placed the box on top of the range—took her hand and confessed.

"I trust my life joyfully in your hands. I am the only real Chief the Klan ever had in North Carolina—"

Claudia's face for a moment flashed a lame triumph that faded into deep anxiety. She suddenly grasped her heart, her breath coming in quick gasps.

"What's that—listen!"

"Why, it's only our two horses neighing to each other."

"You're sure?" she whispered.

"Of course."

"I thought it was something else," she faltered.

"You poor darling! This has been too much for your nerves—you should have allowed me to come with you."

"Yes, I'm afraid I did make a mistake—" she admitted in strange tones.

"There's nothing to be afraid of now—" he said assuringly.

"No—there's nothing to be afraid of now—is there?" she laughed hysterically, and stopped with a suppressed scream.

"Listen—listen! My God! What's that?"

"It's nothing, dear."

"It is. I hear them coming—"

"Impossible, my child, we're all here!" he laughed. "How could you imagine there was any one coming except you and I?"

"You don't understand, and I can't explain!" she went on frantically. She looked at her watch and couldn't see. She recalled with increasing horror the look of devilish determination with which Wilkes had left her that morning. It seemed incredible that he could have moved with his men so quickly. And yet she had told him of this appointment. She had meant to take her own time in reporting its results if she made any report to him at all.

If he had chosen this hour and this lonely spot to attack Craig it would be her doing. It was unthinkable that he should do such a thing. And yet it was possible.

"Quick—strike a match and see what time it is—" she whispered. "We must get away from here—"

He struck the match and saw her eyes shining with a strange madness. She blew the match out, seized his arm and drew him from the window.

"Not there—by the window—over here in this corner."

He struck another match and she masked its light from the window, staring with wide-set eyes at the hands of her watch.

"It's half-past eight, we must go quickly," she urged.

"Come, my darling, remember that I am here—nothing can harm you except the tongue of gossip, and you've shown your contempt for that. Sit down and let me tell you again of my love."

He led her back to the window and she sank tremblingly by his side.

"I've never had the chance to tell you," he began with tenderness, "what a miracle your love has worked in my life. The night I met you, I went to your house with murder in my heart, determined to use the power I wielded to crush your father. I was about to leave with a threat to kill him on my lips. It was no idle threat. I had entered the vault, pushed open its door, stepped inside and saw the way was open."

"The night you came first, you entered alone the covered way?" she interrupted.

"Yes, I meant to use it if necessary."

"But you never did—you never did!" she whispered.

"How could I, dearest? I saw you that night for the first time, heard your voice, touched your hand, and I was a new man. Love, not hate, has ruled me since. I disbanded the Klan immediately and ordered my men never again to use its power."

"Disbanded the Klan!" she repeated in amazement.

"Yes, and a coward reorganized it to further his ambitions. I've done my best to hold in check their crimes and follies. I warned your father of the danger the night those fools came. In a madness of love, fear and jealous rage I came down to the house, sat there in dumb pain

and watched your figure whirl past the window until I could endure it no longer."

Claudia strangled a sob.

"I've reproached myself a hundred times that I didn't prevent that masquerade by force. I might have done it. I had some faithful old soldiers from the foothills in town that day whom I had used to capture the scoundrels who committed the outrage on old Nathan Klein—"

She suddenly put her hand to his lips; her voice a mere gasp of terror. She had seen a white figure steal past the window.

"My God—they've come!" she whispered. "I must save you. Hide—hide—and give me a revolver—I know how to use it—they shall not take you—"

In spite of his protests she pressed him into the shadows. And then in a moment of utter abandonment she threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, I love you—I love you!" she breathed. His lips met hers. She returned his kiss passionately and he crushed her to his heart.

"I must take this glorious moment whatever comes," she sighed.

Her hand touched his head and stroked his hair.

"I thought I hated you, dearest, but I didn't. I couldn't. I know now I've loved you always. I must save you—God help me—"

He soothed her gently, kissed her again and said:

"There's not the slightest danger, my love, but to please you we'll go at once—"

He placed his hand on the door. With a quick spring the girl drew him back and shot the bolt into place.

"I heard some one on the steps," she insisted.

"Impossible—"

"Look out the window and see—" she pleaded. He

cautiously approached the low-set basement window and peered out. He saw a splash of white in the shadows of the trees. A horse stamped his foot and shifted his position.

"What do you see?" she whispered.

"A lot of robed horses—I don't understand—"

"I do," she groaned. "It's George Wilkes. He means to kill you—"

"Nonsense," Craig scoffed. "It's probably a gang of fool boys starting on a raid—"

"It's not, I tell you. It's Wilkes and you must fight for your life—"

Craig drew himself erect.

"The coward wouldn't dare—"

She clung to him desperately. "Not in the open, no—but in the dark with those masked and armed men, he'll do anything. I feel it. I know it—anyhow I'm afraid of him and you must defend me if you won't defend yourself—"

"All right," Craig agreed. He placed the heavy bar across the door, pressed Claudia back into the shadows, seized a club and stood by the entrance.

"You have no pistol?" she whispered.

"No. I never go armed," he answered.

"What have I done—what have I done!" she moaned.

Craig touched her arm for silence.

"Sh— I hear some one talking outside."

He placed his ear to the crack of the door and heard Wilkes' voice distinctly.

"Tell Anderson to stand his guard. I'll be there in ten minutes—"

The girl had crept close and clung to him.

"What did he say?"

"Good news. There's a fight on with his guard. We've

friends out there. If I know them, they'll be here soon—"

Suddenly the butt of a revolver knocked heavily and Wilkes' voice called:

"Open this door!"

"Come in!" Craig shouted.

He felt the girl's figure stiffen at his defiance.

Wilkes voice rang in sharp command and a log smashed against the heavy iron-spiked shutter. It would take work to batter it down. Its timbers were doubled and fastened with clinched quarter-inch, wrought-iron bolts. It would be necessary to hammer it into splinters.

Craig glanced at the heavy bars on the basement windows. There was but one way to get in. With Claudia's help he pushed a table against the door and piled every piece of furniture on it. There were eight or ten chairs. The barricade was not strong. But it was enough to delay the assaulting party. He could hear the crack of pistols in the forest toward the main highway. He knew that a battle was on now in earnest between his friends and the Klan. How on earth they had discovered the attack on him he could not imagine. He accepted the fact gratefully and prepared to sell his life dearly. There could be no doubt of the deadly purpose of the men who were steadily smashing the door to pieces.

As it yielded, he pressed Claudia into the farthest corner of the room, gripped his club and waited. The rays of a lantern pierced the opening, shining uncannily through the splintered timbers. Wilkes was urging the men with vulgar oaths. Two logs were now hammering the broken timbers. The smashed boards fell at last from the hinges, the gang plunged four abreast against the barricade and they were in the room. The leader held his lantern high and saw Claudia standing in the corner and Craig covering her.

He held the men back with a stern gesture, approached and called:

"Put down that club—the jig's up, Craig. I've twenty men here. Five hundred more are coming—will you surrender?"

"I've never known how. You'll have to take me—"

Claudia had approached while he spoke. With a quick spring she tore the mask from Wilkes' face and leaped back to Craig's side.

"What do you mean by helping John Craig?" he demanded.

"You sneaking coward!" she returned. "You didn't dare meet him in a fair fight—"

"You're now defending the murderer of your father?" he sneered.

She stared at Wilkes defiantly.

"You lied to me. John Craig is no longer the Chief of the Klan— He dissolved it before my father's death and a traitor reorganized it—"

Craig gripped her arm for silence as Wilkes shouted:

"You heard it, boys! Her confession that this man has betrayed your secrets—did you hear?"

A growl of approval swept the gang of black hoods. Wilkes pointed to Craig and stepped back out of the line of fight.

"Arrest him for the betrayal of his oath as a Klansman—"

The white robes began to close in. They came with caution. They saw the light of desperation in Craig's eyes and they circled gingerly. With a sudden savage swing of his club he knocked one of them unconscious and they fell back with a chorus of oaths.

Craig backed closer into the corner and forced Claudia behind him. The black hoods bent low and began to creep

closer. Wilkes stood well in the rear, held his lantern high and gave orders.

"Take him without hurting her," he called.

"You'll not take him without killing me," came the angry answer.

Wilkes' face in the light of the lantern was an ugly mask of triumphant hate as he watched his enemy's last stand against overwhelming odds. He grinned and yelled:

"Now!"

With a single impulse the line of masked men leaped on their victim. He fought with supreme courage and unnatural strength. In the struggle he lost his club. Claudia caught it and knocked one of his assailants down before they tore it from her grasp. Twice the swarthy athletic figure broke the hold of his assailants and knocked two of them down with his bare fists. His fight was vain. Twenty to one, it could last but a minute more. Two black hoods gripped his arms while he still struggled desperately. Lowery lifted a clubbed revolver to smash his skull when Wilkes caught it.

"Take him alive—I've a reason—"

A minute more and Craig stood before his enemy, bareheaded, disheveled, his face bleeding and his hands bound behind his back. Wilkes cried triumphantly:

"Now you're mine!"

With his bare hand he slapped his enemy's face two stinging blows, stood back and laughed.

The laugh was cut short. A girl's fist suddenly smashed his mouth. The blow had been delivered so quickly and savagely that the blood spurted from her knuckle and his lips.

A shrouded figure caught her arm before she could

strike again. Wilkes wiped the blood from his mouth and looked at her in angry amazement.

"Take the hell-cat into the next room and lock the door—"

They dragged her into the corridor, thrust her into the next room and secured the door from the outside. An old padlock was hanging loose in the staple. Claudia quickly circled the place, dimly lighted by the moon's rays through the single low window. She saw that it was the laundry of the old mansion and its only door opened into the corridor. She tried to reach the barred window and couldn't. She called through its broken panes but got no answer. She took her place beside the door and listened intently.

She could hear Wilkes' men hurriedly rearranging the furniture in the kitchen. She wondered what scheme of devilish ingenuity he had planned for his night's work.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE COUNCIL

THE furniture back in place, Wilkes proceeded to enact the farce which he had planned. He took his seat in the center of the room and declared the assemblage a "Grand Council of the Invisible Empire." The councilmen in white shrouds and black hoods ranged themselves in semicircle. Wilkes drew the black hood over his own head and ordered the prisoner arraigned before "The Supreme Tribunal of the Klan."

The two men who held Craig's pinioned arms dragged him before Wilkes and stood beside him.

"Gentlemen of the Supreme Council," the presiding officer began, "the outlaw before you is no longer a Klansman entitled to the protection of your order. He has betrayed his solemn oath and imperiled your life and mine. You heard Miss Hawkins in this room repeat his confession of Klan secrets. In conformity to our laws I will swear a witness who will establish this fact under oath—"

He beckoned to a black hood. The man came forward, held up his right hand and Wilkes administered the oath of a court of justice.

"You solemnly swear that the evidence you give in the case of The Invisible Empire against John Craig will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth—so help you God?"

The black hood nodded.

"I do."

"You heard Miss Hawkins make the statement that

John Craig as Chief of the Klan had dissolved the organization?"

"I did—"

"Stand aside."

He turned to the group of shrouded figures.

"What is your verdict, councilmen—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" came the answer in a solid growl.

Wilkes waved his arm to the men.

"The Council may retire. Four guardsmen will remain."

He thrust his black-hooded face into Craig's and said:

"What have you to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced on you for the betrayal of your oath as a Klansman?"

Craig straightened himself with dignity, looked at his enemy and calmly replied:

"You're sowing the wind, Wilkes. You'll reap your whirlwind of anarchy sooner than you think—"

The answer was another blow in the face. Craig's body quivered and his muscles leaped in an instinctive effort to free himself. Reason recalled his position. His body stiffened and his face grew calm as he gazed at Wilkes and said:

"It surpasses human belief that this infamy can be done in a civilized community—"

Before Wilkes could reply the second courier from the front threw himself into the room and whispered Anderson's message. The answer was given in sullen rage:

"Tell Anderson—damn him—to fight to the last ditch and protect this Council. That's what he's there for!"

The courier saluted and hurried from the room.

Wilkes returned to his prisoner and pronounced the death sentence.

"Strip him, swing him by the thumbs, give him forty-nine lashes on his bare back and hang him by the neck until dead—"

He beckoned to the corporal of his guard, turned and left the room. Lowery stepped close to the prisoner, removed his mask and grinned.

"Take a good look at me, my bully boy—it's my turn now!"

He drew the flask from his boot, took a long drink of raw whisky, pressed Craig against the iron column in the center of the room, tied his legs and began to rip his clothes off.

Wilkes walked briskly into the shadows outside and returned with the awkward rider who had caused his delay in arriving. He asked him to wait at the door of the laundry until called. He loosed the padlock, called a black hood to stand guard, and entered the room. He carried a lantern which he placed on the floor and advanced toward Claudia. She retreated and he followed until she stopped him with a threat. In her voice he caught the growl of a tigress. He had felt her bare fist in his mouth. He wondered whether she had found a weapon in the darkness.

"If you put your hand on me, I'll kill you," she warned.

In spite of his bravado on entering he stopped in his tracks and watched her. He saw that her hands were bare. She held no weapon. Her threat was idle, but he tried to conciliate her with smooth words.

"What's the use now to be silly? It's no good. You're in my power to-night. My will is law. You'd just as well forget your anger and be friends. You promised to marry me once. I'm as good a man now as I was then. You're going to make good that promise to-night."

She lifted her head in a gesture of defiance as he went on.

"I've seen to everything. It caused me a little delay but I've got the license in my pocket and a minister, who is a faithful member of the Klan, is waiting outside to perform the ceremony. Will you go through with it or will you fight?"

"I'll fight," she challenged.

"All right," was the smooth answer, "we'd as well settle to-night who is to be master in the house. I can't force you to sign the marriage form or answer the necessary questions the minister will have to ask you under the laws of this state. But I've the horses ready. You'll go with me over the line into South Carolina where no license is required. My friend will pronounce us man and wife by the roadside. At the end of a brief honeymoon you'll come back and be proud to call yourself my wife. Will you go through with the ceremony here or must I take you across the line by force?"

"Try it, you cowardly dog!" was the quick reply.

Wilkes sprang on her, seized her wrists and dragged her toward the door. She fought with a fury that amazed him. He succeeded at last in reaching the door and rapped the signal for opening it. He heard the padlock drawn from the staple and reached for the door with one hand while he held the writhing figure with the other. She saw the unguarded revolver in his belt, suddenly closed on him and snatched it from the holster. He loosed the door, gripped the hand that held it and forced it high over his head. She dropped the barrel downward and tried desperately to pull the trigger. Her finger reached it and she fired. The shot went wild and he twisted her wrist until the pistol fell to the floor. He sprang free to get it and saw that she had her foot on it. He circled her, watching his chance for a quick swing of his body. He made the attempt and she clinched with a savage hold

on his throat, choking him to his knees. He forgot the pistol as he fought to break the death grip on his neck. It required every ounce of his strength to tear her hands away and throw her off. She was on him again. She had found in the close hold that she was his equal in sheer physical strength. His fat was not strength. She hadn't an ounce of superfluous flesh and every muscle was taut with desperation. He found her a veritable tigress. He stepped back and surveyed her with rage.

"You fiend!" he growled.

"Why don't you call for help, you cur?" she scoffed. "You'll have to do it, you know—"

Wilkes was too intent on his task to respond to her taunt. With a sudden leap he hurled her across the room and seized the pistol before she could reach him. He got to the door and called for help. His guard entered. Together they forced her against the wall, seized and dragged her to the center of the room. She caught the iron post and began to scream. Wilkes placed his hand over her mouth and called to his guard:

"For God's sake, give me a handkerchief—"

In the meantime the tragedy in the next room moved swiftly to its end. When Lowery had stripped his victim to the waist, he drew from his belt an ugly blacksnake whip and shook it in Craig's face.

"Take a good look at that, Mr. Lawyerman. You gave me forty-nine lashes on my bare back once. I ain't forgot it. We'll settle the old score to-night. The boss said to hang you. It's too good for your likes. I've decided to let you smell this curlin' piece of raw leather awhile till the idea soaks into your skull and then I'm going to take my own time to beat the life out of you with it. No use to yell. I'll stop your trap with a handful of mud, let you rest a minute and finish you—"

He paused and thrust the whip into Craig's face and growled:

"Smell it!"

He took another drink of whisky, rolled up his sleeves and planted his feet to strike the first blow when a Klansman rushed into the room in wild excitement.

"Every man in line—quick—they are fighting inside the gate!"

Lowery led the guardsmen to the door and dispatched them to the front.

"Go to it, boys—I'll fix Craig."

The white messenger had slipped close to Craig and whispered. His face flamed red. The figure suddenly slashed the ropes that held his arms and thrust the knife into his hand.

As Lowery turned from the door he saw the knife flash and knew that he had been betrayed. With a leap he bore the white figure to the floor, tore off his mask and saw Sammy.

The boy fumbled for his pistol and could not reach it. Lowery reversed the big whip handle, and smashed two terrific blows across the young forehead. The boy's body quivered and was still.

Craig had cut the cords at his feet and before Lowery could rise he was on him and plunged the knife into his shoulder. With a groan of terror Lowery loosed his grip and stretched full length.

In a moment Craig seized the pieces of rope with which he had been tied and securely bound the tough's arms and legs.

He rushed to the boy, took his head in his arms and bent low to catch his words as he smiled feebly.

"I'm glad I got here in time, sir—please tell my father I did my level best!"

Craig smoothed the tangled hair back from the blood-stained forehead, as Sammy died in his arms. While he still held the warm lifeless form the pistol shot in the next room rang its call of peril to Claudia.

He lowered the body gently, took the revolver from Lowery's belt, replaced the iron box inside the range and rushed into the corridor.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TREAD OF SOLDIERS

THE raw youngsters who composed the rank and file of the Klansmen under Anderson were formidable only when led in solid mass against their assailants. In the woods under the shadows of brush and tree they were practically helpless against the rough-and-ready woodsmen who made up the vigilantes under Logan.

When the news spread that their leader had fallen desperately wounded the vigilantes sprang on their foes with a new savage courage. They drove the white sheets before them like sheep. It was not until they reached the open spaces inside the gates of Inwood that Anderson succeeded in rallying them. They had lost their horses in the woods and were fighting now as infantry armed only with revolvers.

Anderson and his officers succeeded in forming a line of a hundred frightened boys in a semicircle inside the gates. He ordered them to lie flat in the broom sedge and hold their fire until the enemy passed the gates.

There was a long ominous silence that got their nerves. Not a shot came from the woods.

"What'ell are they up to now?" a white figure asked the one lying next.

"Search me," was the nervous answer.

An officer walked by in the moonlight and repeated the command.

"Hold your fire now till the whole gang passes the gates and then let 'em have it. Keep your places flat in the

grass and pour it into them. I'll shoot the first fool that gets up."

They waited for five minutes more and still there was no sign of the dark figures in the open. A horse neighed in the woods and his shrill call sent the cold chills down their spines. They thought of the possibility of a mass of roughriders pounding them to death as they lay like helpless lizards in the grass. A boy started to run. An officer fired and he dropped flat.

"None of that now!" he yelled. "They are not mounted. It was only a loose horse neighing."

Another minute passed in silence and from the woods suddenly roared again the Confederate yell as a squadron of dark horsemen plunged through the gates, spread into a charging wave and swept down on the prostrate white figures. The moon's rays showed their position clearly.

The charge was more than undisciplined flesh could bear. The white forms rose and fled toward the ruins in wild confusion. No stand was made until they reached the débris of the fallen house. The officers there succeeded in bringing them to a stand behind the marble pillars and the sheltering shadows of fire and pines.

The vigilantes quickly dismounted and charged on foot. The steady crack of revolvers echoed now from every heap of fallen masonry, from every pillar, and from every shadow of the ruins. With their backs to the wall the frightened boys were fighting, every man for his life. When their ammunition ran out they clinched with their bare hands and fought like beasts in the tangled briars and underbrush.

When Craig rushed into the corridor at the pistol shot from the next room he stood for a moment puzzled. The steady rattle of revolvers overhead told him that the battle was at the doors. The shot he had heard might have been

from without. As he listened to determine if possible the position of his friends, he heard Claudia scream. With a bound he was at the door. They had barred it from the inside. He threw his weight against it and on the rebound looked up and saw the awkward white figure of Wilkes' preacher friend. His eyes were glittering through the holes in his hood as he held a lantern aloft. He was trembling with fear but managed to say, uplifting his hand:

"Peace, my friends—the Lord is our shepherd!"

Craig's fist landed squarely on his jaw and he sprawled on the stone floor. Claudia screamed again and Craig heard fingers inside fumbling the bar. He threw the full weight of his body against the door. It flew wide open and the unexpected impact knocked the three of them into the center of the room. From the floor Wilkes' lantern threw a sickly light on the group. Claudia had freed herself and backed away instantly.

Wilkes with a shiver of fear saw Craig—his hair on end, the naked muscles of his bare body bruised but knotted and quivering with deadly purpose. His right hand gripped the revolver. He looked the avenging Nemesis that he was as he crept slowly toward Wilkes, trying to get Claudia out of line of his pistol.

Wilkes saw his deadly intention and moved in the exact line of the girl's position. Craig paused.

"Come out, you coward, from a girl's skirts. I'll give you a chance with your gun. Stand up, if you're a man."

Wilkes danced back and forth to keep himself between Claudia and Craig and finally managed to whisper to his guard:

"Pot him—pot him—why don't you pot him—"

Craig heard his order and shifted his eyes to the black hood beside his enemy. As the white arm moved upward with stealthy purpose, he fired and the Klansman dropped.

Wilkes' teeth chattered as he backed toward Claudia. Craig suddenly swung his position, cleared the girl and lifted his revolver.

"Let go that gun now or I'll drop you," he demanded.

Wilkes promptly threw down his pistol and edged away. Craig sprang to Claudia's side, covered her with his body and gripped his revolver.

Anderson broke into the room followed by three of his men. He stared for a moment at the scene in speechless rage. His hood had been lost. His face was torn and bleeding, his hair matted with blood, his features twisted with fury. He merely glanced at Craig sheltering the girl and fixed a deadly stare on Wilkes.

"Is this your Grand Council I've been set to guard?" he demanded.

The shivering leader lifted his fat hands in a conciliating gesture.

"Keep your shirt on now, Anderson, everything is all right."

"Oh, is that so?" the Sheriff sneered. "Everything's all right with a lot of my men lying out there in the woods dead or wounded. Everything's all right but I'm done for in this county after to-night. Everything's all right with you, maybe—well, I warned you—damn you—and now I'll show you how to stop this fight—"

His revolver flashed three times before Wilkes sank to the floor. Claudia watched the scene with wide eyes. As the body touched the stones she leaned heavily against Craig. He circled her with his left arm still gripping the revolver in his right hand.

"Steady, my darling, we are all right now."

A Klansman rushed in and shouted:

"There's a regiment of troops outside arrestin' everybody—quick—get out of here—"

Anderson stared as if unable to understand the announcement. As he passed his hand across his forehead in a stupor of uncertainty the Colonel of the regiment of United States troops stepped into the room followed by his staff and guard.

The officers' uniforms were in startling contrast to the dirt and blood-smeared group inside. The four Klansmen with Anderson backed into the room and stood trembling. Their dazed leader seemed still unable to take in what had happened. The Colonel lifted his hand and said quietly:

"In the name of the people of the United States, I command peace."

The tension relaxed. Anderson handed his revolver to an orderly and Craig threw his on the floor.

The Colonel eyed Anderson curiously.

"I understand you are the Sheriff of this county, sir?"

"I am—" was the dull answer.

"And your business is to preserve the peace of this community—"

"Yes, I just waked up to that a few minutes ago."

"You're under arrest, sir."

Two guards touched the Sheriff on the shoulder and led him aside. The Colonel again lifted his hand in quick command:

"I proclaim this county in a state of insurrection—strip those men of their disguises—"

The soldiers began to rip the white robes and throw them in a pile on the floor.

Craig whispered to Claudia. She threw him a startled look and they approached the Colonel.

"With your permission, sir," she said gravely, "we wish to go into the next room for a moment."

The officer bowed.

"Certainly."

With his bare arm about her waist, Craig led Claudia into the other room. He had prepared her for the shock. Old Nathan was kneeling beside Sammy's body gently stroking the blood-tangled hair. He bent and kissed the still warm lips, folded his hands and lifted his eyes streaming with tears.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

With deepening awe the lovers watched his fine face lighted by the sublimest faith in God that could fill the soul of man. The girl pressed his hand, knelt and kissed the boy's forehead. She rose quickly, found Craig's coat, slipped it over his bare body and led him back into the room to the Colonel.

The guard had just thrown the last piece of disguise on the heap before him. The red-splotched robe taken from Anderson lay on top. The Colonel looked at it with somber brooding eyes. He seemed to be talking to himself when he slowly spoke:

"A thing that could only end in riot, bloodshed and martial law—" He paused, drew his fine figure stiffly erect and said with deep emotion:

"There's room for just one uniform in this republic and I am wearing it."

(1)

THE END

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